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Entwistle

EDWARD WILLOUGHBY:

A TALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE,” “CLARE ABBEY,”
&c., &c.

“We may accuse our nature, but it is our pleasure; we may pretend weakness, but it is wilfulness which is the guilty cause of our misde-meanours; for, by God’s help, we may be as good as we please, if we can please to be good.”—BARROW’S SERMONS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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EDWARD WILLOUGHBY.

CHAPTER I.

“Oh ! my best sir, take heed,
Take heed of *lies*.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

“WHAT are you doing here, Ralph?”
exclaimed a young man, laying his hand
on the shoulder of another, as he stood
transfixed before the window of a print shop,
in Regent Street.

“Nothing, my dear fellow.”

“Then what are you going to do ?”

“ Nothing, my dear fellow, I assure you ; nothing at all.”

“ Then, my dear fellow,” said the new comer, laughingly imitating his friend’s peculiar mode of address, “ will you walk with me ? for I want to speak to you.”

“ I shall be too happy. But stay, Edward, what do you think of that face ? —that was what I was looking at, I believe.”

It was the head of a Madonna, remarkable, not so much for divine beauty, as for the expression of a more earthly perfection—a look of guileless purity and stedfast truth.

The Edward thus addressed paused as he was moving away, and returned to look at the print in question : it seemed to rivet his fancy. “ Such a face,” he said at last, in reply, “ as awes and shames a man’s bad nature.” And there was something like a sigh as he spoke.

“That was what I felt, at least I think it was. I wonder how long I have been here.”

“Shall I ask?” said his companion laughingly. “I should suppose it might have been two hours ; you looked as if you were established for the day.”

“No, not so long,” he replied gravely ; “but it doesn’t matter, it has done me good. Now, Edward, I am quite at your service.” And he moved on.

Edward stood for another moment with his eyes on the Madonna ; then following his friend, and putting his arm within his, they went off together.

This friend, Ralph Caradoc by name (the surname pronounced at full length with care and pride, and not degraded to the abbreviation, Cradock), was a tall young man of nine-and-twenty or thirty. His figure was ungraceful, his features large, and his fair com-

plexion freckled and sunburnt ; yet, notwithstanding the lack of personal beauty, no one ever looked in his honest, good-tempered face without pleasure. His mental qualities had something of the same lack as his bodily ones, and the same charm also. He was what is commonly called “slow ;” his manner and way of speaking was slow, his ideas slow ; he was also remarkable for many little peculiarities—one above all of taking everything *au pied de la lettre*, which made it impossible not to laugh at him, even to his face ; yet, at the same time, there was a genuine simplicity in his character, a straightforwardness and truth, an absence of all pretension, and a forgetfulness of self, which, united with good common sense, commanded for him a degree of respect and attachment many cleverer men fail to obtain. If he had a failing, it was one that leaned to virtue’s side—a too kind

heart, whose dictates were occasionally permitted to warp the clearness of his judgment.

His companion was very different, in mind, manner, and appearance. He was only a little above the middle size, and was very slightly formed; but though thin and slight, there was a strong appearance of muscular strength about him, enough, indeed, to detract from the beauty of a well-proportioned frame, had not the *expression* it gave him more than counterbalanced the want. He was vigour, force, and resolution all over. At a distance he might have been called boyish, for he had fair hair, blue eyes, and a fair, clear skin; but on a nearer inspection he might have been supposed to be older even than he was, and he was seven-and-twenty, for there were lines of thought on his brow, and a care-worn expression in his countenance which

had little of youth about it. His features were good; and though too thin and bony to be called handsome, his appearance was very pleasing; it would have been more so but for an occasional expression of bitterness and sarcasm about the mouth which contradicted his clear eyes and sweet smile. It was difficult to see him without interest—impossible to meet the flash of those light eyes without feeling there was *character* beneath; but the interest was of a mixed, and not always of a pleasing, kind.

“Where are you going, Edward?” asked the elder of the two, as the insensible will of the younger guided their steps into Portland Place; “not into the Regent’s Park!”

“And why not into the Regent’s Park?”

“No reason on earth; but people, don’t you know, at this time of day—”

“Don’t talk to me about people, Ralph,”

he said impatiently, “people are nothing to me. I want to speak to you in peace and quiet without having to nod and smirk twenty times in a minute. I wish people would forget me. I thought two years abroad would have done *that* for me if it did no other good.”

“London’s very full indeed,” observed his companion ; “I like it better myself when it is empty.”

They walked some way in silence. Ralph then said, “Can I do anything for you, Edward ? I hope I need not say that it will make me happy if I can.”

“That I know, Ralph, or I should not ask what I am going to ask. It is a mawkish thing to say to a man’s face, but I do believe that you are the best and truest friend that ever was born into this world.”

“My dear fellow,” Ralph cried, colouring all over, “you are very kind.”

“So are you, Ralph: and now, hang sentiment, and let us come to the point. What I want to ask you is, did you ever,”—here he paused and smiled, then drawing his lips into an expression of extreme gravity, continued—“did you ever read ‘Pride and Prejudice.’”

An ejaculation of wild wonder was the only answer to this question.

“Because if you have read it,” Edward proceeded in a tone of grave interest, “I want to know what is your opinion of Mr. Collins.”

Receiving for answer another ejaculation only of like import, and reading in his friend’s expressive countenance a very evident fear of his sanity, he went on with a smile. “For my part I have always looked upon him as a very sensible man. In such circumstances, having the misfortune to have an estate entailed upon him against his will, it was only natural that he should wish to make some reparation, and what could he

do but what he did. What do you think, Ralph?"

The eyes came down from the roots of his hair, and a look of dawning intelligence was visible. "Do you know you really frightened me, Edward? I beg your pardon for being so dull. Now I begin to see, he married his cousin, I think?"

"No, he did not, because he could not; but that is no matter, he wished to marry her, which is the part of his behaviour which has always excited my admiration and sympathy, and to which I wish to direct your present attention; and now I ask you again, what do you think of it?"

"I think it was a good plan if he loved his cousin, not otherwise."

"Wisdom itself! Ralph," said his companion, laughing at the tone of strong sense in which this judgment was pronounced.

“ Solomon could not have spoken better ! Well, my idea is the same, and I mean to act upon it. I mean to marry one of my cousins —second cousins, you remember ;—that is unless they use me as poor Mr. Collins was used.”

“ But I thought there were difficulties, Edward—I thought, I am sure I beg your pardon, but I thought the father hated you.”

“ So he does, most heartily ; but difficulties never stand in the way of a real wish—do they ?—at any rate they will not stand in mine. As long as I can remember I have wished to end this foolish enmity, and my mother”—and his voice as he pronounced the word changed to one of singular softness,—“ wished it also. I don’t mean to say that Sir Hugh has not good reason to dislike me ; I am quite aware he has ; but let him judge

me fairly and justly ; not as now by that monster—report, but by myself, bad and good together—then if the enmity is to go on, why at least there is sense in it. If after acquaintance he hates me still, there is nothing more to be said. No man can help his likes and dislikes, and I for one should be sorry if he could ; but let us be reasonable in our hate ; and above all do not let feuds go on from generation to generation without at least a fair trial to end them.”

“ There you are very right, Edward ; they are shameful things. But what do you mean to do ? Can I do anything ? I am entirely at your service.”

“ I mean you to do something, Ralph, which I will tell you presently. First let me tell you what I have done myself. I said I always hated this enmity. Six years ago when my father died, I felt this so

strongly that I wrote to Sir Hugh to beg him to make up. Here is his answer, I brought it to-day to show you, that you may see the nature of the man."

He drew a letter from his pocket; though but a few words, it was written on a large sheet of paper in a clear bold hand.

"Middlethorpe, June 12, 1814.

"Sir Hugh Willoughby has received Mr. Willoughby's letter, and begs that it may be the last time he addresses him. Mr. Willoughby seems to be fond of quoting proverbs. Sir Hugh Willoughby has heard this proverb—'He that touches pitch shall be defiled.' He begs Mr. Willoughby to think of it. No acquaintance could make him think better or worse of his character. He knows already as much as he wishes to know."

"Not much opening for a reconciliation

there, Ralph," Edward remarked, as his friend returned the letter with a shake of his head and an elevation of his eyebrows; "but I partly blame myself for that. When I wrote that letter I was a young philanthropist;"—his lips curled with an expression of scorn and bitterness as he spoke—"I looked on myself as one of the appointed regenerators of mankind, and I wrote, I don't doubt, in a good lecturing style. As to my proverbs, I don't remember what they were, except that I believe I said, "let bygones be bygones,"—a proverb to which I have much attachment. However, this is not to the purpose. I failed, and so utterly failed that any attempt by letter for the future must be in vain. I did, in a year's time, write again,—but my letter was unnoticed. It was a good one, but the old remembrance was, and I fancy is, too strong. However unexception-

ally I may demean myself, I am nothing but pitch to him. Other attempts I have made, through other persons—I will not trouble you with the account—they have all failed; and nothing now remains but an attempt in person. That is my present plan.”

“And it is a good one, Edward,” Ralph said heartily. “Letters often make things worse. People have a preconceived idea; but go in person with a bold heart and an honest purpose, and the manner of a gentleman, and you will seldom fail.”

“True enough, perhaps, Ralph; but how is it to be done? If I were announced as Mr. Willoughby, I should be taken by the left leg and thrown down stairs, before I had time to exhibit my honest purposes, or my beautiful manners.”

“I don’t know that,” Ralph began, gravely and slowly; but was impatiently interrupted by his companion—

“Ah! Ralph, but I do know; and so I have made up my mind to go in disguise.”

“My dear fellow!” ejaculated Ralph, stopping and withdrawing his arm from his companion in the very middle of a crossing.

“Yes, in disguise, Ralph—but this is not exactly the properest place for a discussion. Come on and I will tell you my plan. There is a little shooting lodge to be let about two miles from Middlethorpe. I know nothing about it—for, though I was down there once, I was not then thinking of the lodge; but, I am told that, for the kind of thing, it is a peculiarly decent little hole. This lodge, my dear Mr. Caradoc, I mean you to hire for the approaching shooting season; and, having hired it, I mean you to go down and take possession. Then, as I presume, you will not wish to remain in solitude, I intend you to invite, as will be natural, a friend to pass

a few weeks with you—and that friend I intend to be. I shall come down as a stranger, bearing some name hereafter to be chosen. As your stranger friend you will present me at Middlethorpe; and this is the way in which I shall woo Sir Hugh and one of my cousins."

"And then?" inquired his companion gravely.

"Why, and then having won their hearts, I mean, of course, to take off my disguise; and then we shall, I hope, live together happily all the days of our lives, as they did in story books in my young days."

Ralph walked on in silence, and made no comment on the plan unfolded for his instruction.

Edward waited with an expression of anxiety on his countenance for a moment or so—then he said, "By your silence, Ralph, I gather that you don't like my plan?"

“No, I don’t.”

“But why?”

“I don’t think it honest,” he said with vehemence; “I hate crooked ways—it’s a lie.”

Edward was silent and thoughtful for a moment. “I am not going to defend every particle of the scheme,” at last he replied; “if it comes to an argument you will have the best of it, I know—it is not a case that will bear strict scrutiny. It is what some would call a foolish—some a romantic scheme. But whatever it is, my mind is made up. There may be a small, a very small particle of evil in it; but it is to effect, I hope, a great good.”

“Good never does come of evil,” said his companion doggedly.

“That is a bold assertion, Ralph. At any rate in this case, no great harm can come.

Disappointment is the worst we have to expect."

Ralph shook his head.

"Why, what do you expect? What visions has your brilliant imagination conjured up? Do you think I shall be put in the stocks for imposture, or hanged at Tyburn as a spy? If so, it is my affair, not yours. Don't talk to me of evil,—for I don't care. I am like the naughty boy in the fable; for anything that happens to me, *I don't care*. I have set my mind on this plan and nothing shall move me."

"I don't quite know what I mean or expect," Ralph began again, his grave, determined tone totally unmoved by the sportive manner of his friend; "I only feel that evil may come, perhaps not only to you. Such crooked ways always bring trouble and sorrow with them. My dear Edward, give it

up. It's a bad plan ; it's a mean, selfish, lying, pitiful scheme, and I hate it !”

“ Well done, Ralph,” said Edward, laughing ; and if affected by the exhortations of his companion, showing no symptoms of it in manner or countenance ; “ your eloquence certainly lies in the forcible line. But now,” he added, more gravely, “ let us come to the point. My mind is made up, nothing you can say will move me. The only question is, will you help me, or will you not ? The fact is—and you must not be offended—I did not come to ask your advice, I can do without that ; what I want is your assistance. It is a simple question. Will you help me ? ”

Ralph hesitated, and looked much distressed. It was his weak point. He could not bear to refuse any request—above all, he could never bear to refuse Edward.

While he hesitated, Edward spoke again, and though there was anxiety there was no entreaty in his tone. “Let us understand one another, Ralph. I don’t wish for any *sacrifices*. What is done for me I like to have done willingly, or not at all. A reluctant gift, in my eyes, is no gift at all. Therefore, consider well before you answer me. I come to you for assistance because you are my best and dearest friend, and there is no man in the world to whom I would so willingly be indebted—but I *can* do without you. Now, Ralph, what do you say? or would you rather take the subject and think it over at your leisure?”

Ralph cleared his throat, looked first unhappy, then ashamed, then irresolute, then resolute, then cleared his throat again, then at length gave his reply. “My dear fellow, it will be no use for me to take the subject

and think it over, for what I felt at first I shall feel till doomsday. I hate the plan, but I can't refuse you. I know I'm a fool ; so I always was, and so I always shall be. So there it is, Edward, I wish I could say no, but I can't. I'm at your service, make what use of me you please."

"Thanks," his companion said, with warmth ; then suddenly changing his tone and manner, which hitherto had been a singular mixture of earnestness and levity, to one of deep and almost passionate feeling, he went on,—"Don't think me selfish, Ralph, for accepting your offer ; think me mad, harebrained, what you will, but not selfish. I shall do you no harm, and I want you to help to do me a great good. The fact is, Ralph, I want to marry. I am not very old, but I am already weary of the world. All my hopes and wishes have been disappointed.

I have seen mankind in all grades of society, and I am disgusted with them. Don't shake your head, Ralph, I know what you mean, you would say I have seen the bad and not the good. It may be so, but where are the good to be found? I have seen high and low, rich and poor, and I have only found one honest man, and that is you, Ralph. I am not what I once was; I have been deceived, and I am awokened. For my awaking you would say I ought to be thankful, but I would rather be deceived again than feel as I do now. I am weary of the world and its ways. I thought strange lands and strange faces would bring me back my youthful feelings, but they have not done it; I come back weary as I went, and now my only hope and dream is domestic happiness. I want to marry, and find my youth again in my wife and children's eyes."

“Yes, my dear Edward, I see, I understand,” Ralph replied, with the full and ready sympathy which made him so invaluable a friend; “but—I beg your pardon—but is there no wife to be found without plotting and disguises. You have a wide world open to you, and, I say it without flattery, are not likely to find hard measure. Will no fruit serve you but the forbidden fruit?”

“None,” Edward replied, with some vehemence; then, his manner suddenly resuming its former sportiveness, “I feel so entirely with that most sensible of women, Mrs. Bennet, about the entail, that I am heartily ashamed of myself for having any part in so heinous a transaction, and will do all in my power to make what reparation I can. Besides,” he continued, again more seriously, “I believe my cousins to be brought up as I should wish my wife to be. I would as

soon marry a furbelowed satin gown, Ralph, as a London young lady. Sir Hugh may be puzzle-headed and prejudiced, but he is no fool, and he knows how to order a family and household. He is worshipped by his dependants, and his children live as happily with him in his quiet home as Adam and Eve lived in Paradise. Nothing like a country life and well-regulated education for producing that naturalness, innocence, and stedfastness, which are the qualities of which my wife must be made. And now, Ralph, have I convinced you that I have at least good reasons on my side?"

"I say no more, my dear fellow; when a man has made up his mind it is sheer loss of time to argue with him."

"True, Ralph; and for good or bad, my mind is made up. Now let us descend to small particulars, not forgetting the filthy lucre part of the business."

A minute discussion of all the ins and outs of the scheme followed, and everything was settled on a most satisfactory foundation. Ralph was but an eldest son, and not a very wealthy one; but Edward was rich and lavish, and no money difficulties cast a shadow in the way.

When all was arranged, Ralph suddenly said, "But what am I to call you, Edward? my bungling tongue had better begin to practise."

"No hurry, Ralph, it is a subject requiring mature reflection. I must have a decent, respectable name, but not a fine one. No St. Legers or De Veres, I will owe nothing to my name; I will ponder upon it to night."

"Better settle it at once. Have you no name in your own family? who was your great-grandmother on the mother's side?"

"My great-grandmother!" he exclaimed,

laughing heartily. “ My dear Ralph, I have no conception who she was. Have you? for yours would do just as well.”

“ Mine was a Snow,” he replied gravely.

“ A Snow! No, thank you, Ralph, that is an unpromising, icy name. Now I think of it, some of our ancestors were Leighs, and I don’t see why I should not be a Leigh. You like it?”—as Ralph nodded—“ well so be it. It is a good, sound name, and yet has no flourish about it. Allow me then, Mr. Caradoc, to introduce you to Edward Leigh, Esq., of Westmoreland.” And he bowed low, while Ralph endeavoured to suppress a smile and to shake his head.

So they parted; and his consent once given, Ralph Caradoc was too good-tempered and unselfish to worry Edward with further advice and remonstrances. He called himself “ a weak old fool,” and other epithets of a

like nature several times a day, and in no measured terms; but these were solitary reflections, and when called upon for assistance and interest, he had them always ready to bestow.

CHAPTER II.

In the springtime of my life,
Was I when I sought to roam ;
And the festival of youth,
Left I in my father's home.

It was evening, it was morning,
Never, never stood I still ;
But for ever darkness shrouded,
What I sought with ardent will.

FROM SCHILLER, "THE PILGRIM."

Sir Hugh Willoughby and Mr. Willoughby, the father of Edward, were first cousins. Sir Hugh was well off—Mr. Willoughby nearly equally so. The father of one inherited in the direct line from his forefathers ; the other from his mother, an heiress. No money concerns had occasioned the enmity between them ; but something which, at least in their

young days, touched more deeply than money—opinions.

Sir Hugh was a Tory, by feeling and character as well as opinion. No new Tory ; nothing accommodating about him, but a lover of old things *because* they were old ; and a hater of every change, good or bad, in small things or in great, *because* it was a change. His enemies and even his friends called him a blind bigot—not without reason ; for being an opponent of education in general, he would have scorned to enlighten his own individual eyes by such a means. He loved the cloak of prejudice in which he had wrapped himself, as his own life, and would have laid down one as willingly as the other. To argue with him was a vain endeavour ; to convince impossible. He had a balance, in many points a good and just one, in which all questions were weighed,

the weightiest and the most trifling ; but there was this peculiarity in his scales, that trifles were apt to weigh the heaviest.

With all this, however, Sir Hugh was no man to be scorned. He had good parts ; enough to have done honour to cultivation, had he given them that advantage. He was remarkable also for shrewd common sense, and for a moral worth which, unless where passion or prejudice strongly interfered, seemed by intuition to guide him right. In his own kingdom, therefore, he ruled wisely and well, and was worshipped as a wise ruler of his kind, prejudices and all, is sure to be. Description cannot do justice to him ; there was a warmth in his feelings and a heartiness in his manners, which attracted from those who came near to him affection of no common kind ; while a vein of quaintness in his character gave, even to his prejudices, a certain

charm which enlightenment cannot always command.

His cousin Mr. Willoughby's character was the opposite of Sir Hugh's. Progress was his word, and at a time when progress had a more startling sound than now-a-days. With less common sense than Sir Hugh, he was far cleverer, and he had cultivated his powers with care and industry. He was one of those who watched with intense delight the gathering of the storm in France; who was carried to madness while the fury of the tempest lasted; and who, when the excesses in the name of liberty had sobered the most enthusiastic, clung to his first love with affection unchanged and unchangeable.

To say the truth, Mr. Willoughby's opinions were but opinions. He had a fine voice, and great command of language; and satisfied with his eloquence in favour of liberty, he

took no other steps to promote its cause. It was otherwise with his only son. The boy was of an enthusiastic temperament, and his father's words stirred him almost to madness. While the one sat still and spoke, the other was burning to rise and do. At fifteen, his mother—a woman of rare character, whose influence had always influenced her son to good—died, and with her died all that could have withheld him from a mad and headlong course. His father still sate at home ; but in spirit he followed his son, and with his spirit animated him. Edward became the prey of democrats and demagogues ; enrolled himself in secret societies ; maddened himself with studies of the most dangerous and exciting kinds ; and it was no fault of his that overt acts did not follow upon the agitation that was stirred up, and bring him to an untimely end.

His character was a peculiar one, at once fiery and stubborn ; by his fire and resolution influencing others, and yet by the heat of others led away and led astray himself. His extreme youth and inexperience added to the latter danger, while the studies in which he indulged, perverting a naturally clear judgment, made his very knowledge a snare. Authority became a name hateful to him ; and in the rooting up all landmarks in his mind, even the springs of belief itself were shaken.

His history was the history of many others ; so also was the history of his awakening. He found himself deceived. As with advancing years and deeper thought, his eyes opened, he found that truth and honour were not the principles of those in whom he trusted ;—where he had supposed a zeal to burn, fervent and pure as his own, self-interest appeared. He woke at last to dis-

appointment and disgust. Not that honest men were entirely banished from the party to which he belonged—the fault was more in himself. Caught by showy and meretricious qualities, he put his trust unworthily, and therefore was deceived.

He came to himself. His opinions, perhaps, remained unchanged, but with his disgust with men his zeal for opinions died away.

He came to himself; but not uncontaminated. The society in which he had lived—shrewd and clever, but often wild and lawless—left its marks upon him. His mind had lost its freshness and brightness; its generous aspirations; its purity and truth. Seeing much of the evil of the world, he learnt almost to doubt of virtue; and though in the calm that followed on excitement, and in the healthier studies to which he turned,

he reverted unconsciously to the faith of his early years, it was not with a belief that brought forth perfect fruits. One quality only remained in his mind fresh and strong as in his first youth, and that perhaps the highest in man's fallen nature, and from which all true reformation springs—the love and admiration for whatsoever things were pure and lovely, and of good report. He might not conform himself to the image of virtue he worshipped; but he did worship it, contemplating with longing desire the ideal standard he had set up.

Of these deeper feelings, however, he said little. When he came to himself, he was weary; he missed the fire that had burnt so brightly, and he tried to dissipate his weariness as best he could. But his efforts were vain. He plunged into the excitements common to his rank and years; but found

them tame and commonplace. He sought relief in the excitements of foreign travel; but though for a time it might be found, this too soon lost its zest. In truth, the mind that has occupied itself with questions of high import; whose aim and end has been, in however mistaken ways, to redress wrongs, to raise the oppressed, to bring in “a golden year,”—can never be filled with the tamer draughts of selfish pleasure. Edward remained restless and dissatisfied;—known to his friends by a lively wit and sarcastic tongue, but hiding in his heart bitter regrets and passionate longings.

Sir Hugh Willoughby very early had marked his dislike of the opinions of his cousin, Mr. Willoughby; and, as being the head of the family, thought it incumbent upon him to remonstrate. The remonstrances were unavailing. Such things usually are so; and

being unavailing, became a new cause of dissension. When the prospects darkened and the wisest were dismayed, Sir Hugh might be excused for exulting in his own wisdom, and rooting his cherished opinions more firmly in his mind. He styled his cousin mad; and as with him opinions were always considered in their moral bearings, the madness of his cousin assumed the form of guilt, and was treated accordingly. His dislike became in his own mind a virtue.

The feelings, however, excited by the opinions of the elder Mr. Willoughby were calm, compared to those excited by the actions of the son. With every species of exaggeration the life and conduct of Edward Willoughby was reported at Middlethorpe; and his name became synonymous in the mind of Sir Hugh with rebel, democrat, atheist, and profligate. Of the possibility of falsehood or exaggeration, Sir Hugh took no

account ; his mind was of that tenacious kind that has no power to sift and weigh. What he heard, he heard with his ears, his memory, and understanding. The seed that fell, good or bad, took root, and rarely if ever was unrooted again.

Such being the state of Sir Hugh's feelings, it was no wonder that Edward's attempts at reconciliation were repulsed. Of the internal reformation that had taken place he had no outward proof to show, while his careless, restless life gave Sir Hugh an advantage in his harsher judgment. He thought Edward a bad man, and as such he would have nothing to say to him.

To do Sir Hugh justice, the fact of Edward being his heir added no fuel to the flame. He looked calmly forward to his succession to the family estates ; and had a Christian hope that he would at some time prove himself less unworthy of his

name. He had passionately desired a son ; but when his young wife—many years younger than himself—died, leaving him only with two little girls, he never contemplated the forming of new ties. Once, on an occasion when Edward's conduct gave the strongest grounds for his condemnation, an old friend had attempted to encourage and console Sir Hugh by the suggestion of such an idea ; his brow clouded, and he replied, “That would be taking matters into my own hands and acting like an Atheist myself. What have I to do with guarding Middlethorpe when I am dead ? I am not so presumptuous as to suppose that Almighty God wants my hands to work with.” No change, therefore, occurred in their relationship in this respect ; neither did any change occur in Sir Hugh's feelings towards his heir up to the time at which this story begins.

CHAPTER III.

“ Through pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”

SONG.

It was a lovely summer evening in July. Sir Hugh Willoughby and his family had dined, and the lamps were lighted in the drawing-room ; but the windows were open, and the daylight was lingering in the garden without.

Sir Hugh was asleep in a large arm-chair by the empty fireplace. He was nearly seventy, and his head was white, but he

looked strong and healthy. The expression of his countenance was honest and fearless ; and if there were signs betokening to a physiognomist heat and obstinacy of temper, there were signs as strongly marked of good-humour, and warmth and tenderness of heart.

A little behind him, near a round table, on which a lamp was placed, sat an old lady hemming frills. At first you were inclined to call her a she-dragon, for her eyes had a keen, observant glance, as of one accustomed to keep watch, while her harsh features and deep mourning dress gave to her appearance something grim ; but a little observation considerably softened your first impression, and if she was a dragon, you felt secure there was no great cause to fear her power. This lady was Mrs. Holles, a widow of small fortune, distantly related to Sir Hugh, whom,

some years after his wife's death, he had invited to take up her abode in his house. She was remarkable for her strong language and opinions ; but, like the elder Mr. Willoughby, rarely went further than expressing herself ; and without exerting much authority, lived in peace and quiet in the family among whom she was domesticated.

Flitting about the room, light and lovely as a bird, was a young girl of seventeen. She was engaged in cutting and arranging flowers ; now bending over the tables ; now plunging Mrs. Holles into obscurity, and begging her pardon in consequence ; the next instant she was in the garden gathering fresh flowers, and singing in a clear and birdlike voice as she wandered among the beds. She was very pretty—her beauty of a kind which nurses call “like a young cherub ;” her eyes were blue, her complexion

dazzling, her hair like threads of gold, and her expression open and innocent.

On the other side of the fireplace, working by the light of another lamp, sat a young girl about three years older. The sisters were much alike, and yet very different: they had the same light figures, and softly cut features, and fair skins and hair; on the other hand, one was blooming—the other pale; one had blue eyes, clear and bright—the other had brown eyes, serious and deep; one had all the sunshine of beauty—the other had a kind of shadow upon her, not of melancholy, but something without glare—calm, refreshing, and still.

It is difficult to describe the features or character of the elder sister; for while the former had that delicacy and evanescence of expression, painters find it so hard to pourtray, in the latter was something of the same

peculiarity—a harmonious blending of many qualities—which made her, though far from wanting in definiteness or individuality, wanting in those marked characteristics superficial observers catch at once. Yet if her countenance was studied, many things and much to interest appeared. There was about her a peculiar gentleness, which spoke of a nature apt to look up, and disposed to cling ; and her eyes had a soft, passionate light which betokened feelings it might be hard to control ; yet, opposed to these qualities, there was a frank simplicity of manner belonging to one who went straight forward on the path of duty, looking neither to the right hand nor the left, and on her brow there was a stedfastness and serenity as if she had already found an anchor for her soul. These things might be seen, yet rather in their germ than as developed—even more than in the sunny

beauty of her sister, there was youth in her air and the simple unconsciousness of a child in her manner.

Such was the family party assembled in the drawing-room at Middlethorpe.

“Who’s there?” cried Sir Hugh, waking out of his sleep, and starting suddenly up in his chair.

“No one, papa,” said his youngest daughter, Ellen, laughing. “I am afraid I have made a little noise; but except my noise there has not been a sound for twenty minutes.”

“I thought I heard a footstep,” observed Sir Hugh, sleepily. “Why, and so I did—I knew I was right—my ears never deceive me.”

“I beg your pardon,” said a very tall man, stepping in at the open window, “but I thought I heard voices in the garden—

I thought—I thought, in fact, I should find somebody there."

"So you did, so you did. That magpie has been chattering in the garden till I am almost deaf. No pardons, beg no pardons—in at the window, or in at the door, always welcome."

The person to whom this cordial greeting was addressed was a thin, tall, soldierlike looking man, of about forty or something under; an awkwardness in the movements of one arm, a scar over one brow, a bronzed complexion, and black hair lightly sown with grey—spoke of a youth of honourable exertion; but these things rather gave interest to his appearance than detracted from it. His countenance was very pleasing; something of almost feminine softness, blending not inharmoniously with his soldierlike figure, and a certain formality in his air. His name

was Colonel Ashton; but he had left the army, with this proviso, that he was always ready if his services were required by his country. Three years before this time he had succeeded, by the death of an elder brother, to a good property in a distant county; but two or three of the summer months he was in the habit of passing at a small house in the neighbourhood of Middlethorpe.

Colonel Ashton stood for a few minutes in the window, looking shy; but recovering himself, he approached Ellen, as she stood surrounded with flowers, and put a small jeweller's case into her hand. "It is your birthday, I think," he said: "I give this with many good wishes. I could not get here this morning. Don't thank me,"—and he hurriedly retreated before her thanks and eager exclamations. "It is my duty and my pleasure. If the old don't think of the

young, they don't deserve that the young should think of them."

"Oh ! papa, is it not pretty ?" Ellen cried, approaching her father with a gold bracelet in her hand. "It is too pretty for me, I mean"—and she turned from her father to raise her grateful, sparkling eyes to Colonel Ashton—"it is too pretty for you to give me —too much—indeed it is."

He was still standing, looking tall and shy. It now occurred to him that his position might be improved by sitting down, and as Clare at the moment resumed her seat, he sat down by her side.

Sir Hugh devoted himself to an inspection of the bracelet, and took out his spectacles to do it justice. "Well," he said at last, "for one of your new-fangled things—I beg your pardon, Ashton, it's pretty enough; but there certainly is a lack of taste in these days. Did

I evershow you my grandmother's trinkets?—they're worth looking at, worth twenty of these things. We're going down hill,"—playfully shaking his head,—“ I see it in everything, these fancy articles as well as all the rest.”

“ This belonged to my mother,” observed Colonel Ashton, colouring slightly, yet speaking with a little quiet malice in his tone. “ I have only had it brushed up and a slight alteration made in the cypher.”

“ Ah ! Papa,” exclaimed Ellen, laughingly.

“ I am sure, Sir Hugh, I don't know how you could mistake so much,” said Mrs. Hollis, with some contempt. “ I saw from the first moment that Colonel Ashton's gift had no trumpery about it.”

“ Ha, ha ! ” laughed Sir Hugh, “ ha, ha ! But what did Ashton have it brushed up for. I would rather have seen it with its grey

hairs upon it. Give it to us again ; and if you please, Mrs. Hollis, let us have some more light. Ah ! true enough, no trumpery here.”

While Sir Hugh, with perfect complacency, exhibited some marks of good workmanship in the bracelet, Colonel Ashton entered into conversation with Clare.

“Seventeen, isn’t she ?” he remarked with a nod towards Ellen, and a half-suppressed sigh. “I hate to think of it. Seventeen never comes again!”

“No,” Clare replied, ponderingly, as if the trite remark had something new in it to her ears ; “but then some people do not miss it. Ellen never will.”

“I think so ; yes, you are very right. Her gaiety is from the heart, and that never dries up. But still,” with another sigh, “there is something in youth which I

would keep if I could. Youth never comes again!"

"Would you have it come again?" Clare asked, with the curiosity young minds are apt to feel in the sensations of those older than themselves.

"For myself, do you mean? They say a man is a fool who says yes; and yet, as an honest man, I can't say no,—yes," (with some vehemence,) "I would be young again."

"But why?"

"Why! Miss Willoughby, that's a home question; but I think I can answer it. I am come to that age when, without having a right to the reverence age commands, I begin to feel that I am no longer fit company for the young."

"That is too unkind a speech for me to answer," Clare said playfully.

"Unkind! Miss Willoughby. Why unkind?

It is the natural principle of youth to like youth. I did, myself, when I was young."

"If it is the natural principle," she continued, in the same tone, "there are exceptions to the rule. Ellen professes not to like very young people at all."

"Ah! Miss Willoughby," he said, shaking his head, "what is *professes*?—what can she know of the matter?"

"I think one can have a taste even at seventeen," Clare said smilingly. "We had a discussion on this very subject yesterday."

"And what did you say?"

"What *I* said I will not tell you, not at least to-night," she replied, fearlessly answering the questions of her father's friend; "but Ellen said that she liked the thoughtfulness of older people much better than the excitement of younger ones; and I am sure she said what she felt."

“It is flattery, Miss Willoughby,” he said, smiling, and his brow clearing,—“pleasant flattery; but I will receive it, though I am afraid if youth was at hand Miss Ellen would soon find the fallacy of an opinion.”

“No,” Clare said, shaking her head; and so the strife ended.

“Now, Clare, go and play,” exclaimed Sir Hugh; “and let us have ‘Hailstones’ first, and ‘Haydn’s Surprise’ next, in honour of my young lady; and you and I, Ellen, will have our game at backgammon. No, that won’t do—how shall it be?—Ellen and Ashton shall have their game at backgammon, and I will talk to Mrs. Hollis.”

“Thank you, Sir Hugh; but I am busy.”

“Oh! those frills, those frills!” Sir Hugh cried good-humouredly, contemplating the yards of broad-hemmed frilling escaping from Mrs. Hollis’s nimble fingers; “and what becomes of them all is what puzzles me.”

“Sir Hugh,” she replied, raising one indignant glance to his face, and casting another upon the beautifully plaited white cap, cape and ruffles, which gave to her deep mourning attire a picturesque and pleasing air.

“Ah!” he said penitently, “yes; I beg pardon—I beg twenty thousand pardons. Never mind me, Miss Ellen, get to your game. I will listen to Clare play. Ah! that’s it, that’s a fine thing”—as she began the “Hail-stone Chorus” with all the energy in which he delighted,—“you’ve nothing like that now-a-days, Ashton.” And he walked to the piano-forte, and accompanied the music with the beat of his foot.

Sir Hugh’s taste for old times had extended itself to music. He gave his daughters the choice of playing Handel, Haydn, Purcell, Locke, &c., or not playing at all: the new tunes, he observed, had nothing in

them. Ellen thankfully availed herself of the latter alternative. Her powers of attention were soon exhausted, and the grave sonatas appointed for her early practice, offended her taste and baffled her patience. Clare, on the contrary, had shown an intuitive liking for the full chords and solemn tones of the music in which her father delighted; and giving her heart to the work, soon made of the labours of practice a labour of love. Some music is tolerable, and gives tolerable pleasure, if only played tolerably well; but these old masters require a special liking and talent in their pupils, or they lose their spirit, and with their spirit much of their beauty. This love, which, in fact, is talent, Clare gave, whether to the stirring choruses her father preferred, or the graver pieces, in which she had her own peculiar delight. Whatever she played, her heart

was in it, and this gave to her playing an attraction not common.

Ellen and Colonel Ashton sat down to the backgammon board; but the latter seemed more inclined to converse than to play.

“What have you been doing all day?” he inquired, with peculiar interest in his manner.

“Nothing, I am afraid,” she replied. Then casting a merry, wilful glance at Mrs. Hollis, she added, “Nothing, I know. I have had such a scolding about it!”

“If you please, Miss Ellen, allude in a different manner to our conversations;”—and Mrs. Hollis put down her frills, and looked awful. “Colonel Ashton, have you any influence with this young lady?”

“Have I any influence?” he asked, looking at her with a smile so sweet, and an expression so fond, that she blushed, as she laughed an incomprehensible answer.

“Because if you have, it will be as well

to exert it. If Miss Ellen goes on as she does now, she will be a disgrace to the name of woman."

"What have you done?" asked Colonel Ashton.

"She is idle, she does nothing; and we all know what idleness leads to;" repeating, with great vehemence—

"For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do!"

And when I speak to her, as is my bounden duty, and point out the evil of her ways, she answers me, that she does not mean to be idle; for she means to sing all her life long!"

"I am afraid, Mrs. Hollis," Colonel Ashton said gravely, "I shall rather advocate the singing; the world may well be allowed to have some few birds among its many beasts."

"Folly, stuff, and trumpery!" she said, with vehemence.

“What is trumpery?” exclaimed Sir Hugh, returning at the sound of Mrs. Hollis’s favourite word.

“Colonel Ashton has been giving me bad advice, papa, and encouraging me to be idle; but I don’t mean to take it: I mean to begin a new life to-morrow, and do whatever you tell me.” And Ellen pushed her chair towards Mrs. Hollis, and looked smilingly in her face.

“You have said to-morrow, Miss Ellen, as long as I can remember; but your to-morrow never comes.”

“This time it will, really and really.”

“There is no doubt we all should be as busy as we can,” remarked Sir Hugh, with a wise look—then, seating himself in his chair, and preparing for a gossip, “Well, Ashton, have you got anything to tell us to-night?”

“ Nothing, I think,” replied he, withdrawing his eyes from Ellen.

“ Nothing more about the Lodge? eh! Well, I wish it had been taken.”

“ Oh, yes, the Lodge is taken; I thought you were aware of that.”

“ No, really!” exclaimed Sir Hugh, sitting upright to listen. “ Well, I’m heartily glad to hear it; I hate to have these tumble-down houses about, as if people were afraid to live in our country, which, thank Heaven! they needn’t be. Well, and so it’s actually taken, is it?”

“ Taken, oh! yes; and there are masons at work, and carpenters at work, and upholsterers, and have been these three days. The young gentleman is to be down next week, I hear.”

“ What is his name?” Clare asked, leaving the pianoforte, and sitting down with the others. “ I heard it one day, and it struck

me as an odd one; but I have forgotten it."

"Caradoc," said Colonel Ashton; "it is an old Welsh family."

"A good name," exclaimed Sir Hugh; "it sounds British."

"British, indeed! It's a very ancient name; I know the family, and they claim descent from some of the old kings of Wales."

"Indeed!" said Sir Hugh, with satisfaction; "that is a descent worth having. Now, I would rather be a Caradoc than a new-made duke a thousand times over."

"And is Mr. Caradoc worthy of his royal descent?" Clare asked, smiling.

"I believe so. I don't know him personally, but he bears a high character. His father lives about twenty miles from my house in Monmouthshire; and he is a thoroughly respectable man."

“Respectable!” said Ellen, laughing; “that is a very small word for a king.”

“What would you have better, magpie?” cried her father. “I hope you will be respectable, that is all.”

“Miss Ellen hoped to hear of something heroic, I see,” Colonel Ashton observed, smiling; “but I am afraid I can hold out no hopes of heroic qualities. If this young gentleman is like his father, he is a sensible, worthy young man, and nothing more.”

“And worth all the trumperies in the world,” observed Mrs. Hollis.

“True, Mrs. Hollis—very true,” said Sir Hugh, mournfully; “and it would be well if we could say the same of all young men who boast a high descent. It’s a shame, now”—suddenly clenching his hand, and stamping with his foot;—“a Willoughby too. It’s a shame, and still more grief than shame.”

“It is indeed to be regretted,” Colonel Ashton said soothingly, instantly seizing the allusions of his old friend; “but you know my opinion, it will all come right in time. I am not one of those who say a young man must sow his wild oats before he is fit for anything; there’s neither truth nor sense in that; but for all I have ever heard of Edward Willoughby his worst follies may be the fruits of naturally good and generous dispositions, and where that’s the case there’s strong hope for the man.”

“I am glad you say that,” Clare said, with a flash of pleasure in her eyes; “no one here ever says a word in Edward’s favour.”

“Because they can’t,” Sir Hugh said, shortly. “There would be plenty said, if it could be said. You’re a good fellow, Ashton, but you know no more of Edward Willoughby than that silly child does, who thinks every one is as innocent as her own self. But

what do we talk of him for—on Ellen's birthday, too? Let us have done with him. Get back to your music, Clare, and play us a Dead March, or something of the kind to soothe us, and then let us have a little rational conversation before we go to bed."

CHAPTER IV.

“A good old English gentleman, all of the olden time.”

SONG.

A WEEK later Mr. Grantley, the clergyman of the parish, called at Middlethorpe. It was in the evening, and the same party as that described in the last chapter were assembled. Evening visits were a fancy of Sir Hugh's, and a fancy, during the summer months, indulged by all his neighbours. He was fond of a gossip; but not inopportune gossip. In the daytime he liked to wander

about at his pleasure ; in the evening, when not too sleepy, he liked to be entertained by others.

Mr. Grantley was a good old country gentleman, leading and guiding his flock aright rather by good example and fatherly interest in their welfare, than by force of intellect or fire of zeal. Simple, frank, and kindhearted, with good sense, and a mind cultivated above the average ; these were his qualifications, and qualities that won him universal love and respect.

“ Welcome, Doctor,” cried Sir Hugh, as his name was announced. “ I’m heartily glad to see you.”

The daughters rose to meet him, and Clare placed him a chair near her own. She was very fond of him, and he was very fond of her,—that you saw at once.

“ All well ?” he asked, looking round ;

“but that is a question I need not ask—of these young ladies at least.” And his eyes rested with old-fashioned admiring gallantry on the pretty evening dresses of the sisters.

“We should be curious animals if we could be ill in this weather, Doctor,” replied Sir Hugh. “What a summer we have, to be sure.”

“It is, indeed, glorious summer weather, and old Dobson prophesies that we shall have it all through the autumn.”

“And Dobson is always right,” observed Ellen. “I am so glad—I like sunshine.”

“You have no great need to care about it, Miss Ellen; you carry your own sunshine about with you. But you are right, it is a pleasant thing to see the sun. I often think that it is one of those blessings of a gracious Providence, for which, because it is so common a blessing, we forget to be thankful.”

“True enough, Doctor,” Sir Hugh said, nodding his head wisely ; “and it shows what ungrateful mortals we naturally are.”

“I am come up to-night upon a little errand,” continued Mr. Grantley, putting on an air of some importance ; “a little commission, which I promised to execute.”

“Out with it, then, Doctor ; you know you have but to ask, and your request, if it is a request, is granted.”

“Why it is a request, Sir Hugh. The fact is—and perhaps this will be interesting to the young ladies—I received a visit this morning from your new neighbour, Mr. Caradoc. He came in company with a young gentleman, a friend, who is going to pass the autumn with him.”

“And they want to shoot over my preserves ! is that it, Doctor ?” exclaimed Sir Hugh, rubbing his hands ; “but you needn’t

speak, I know it is. I'm a pretty good hand at a guess."

"Wrong, my dear Sir Hugh, quite wrong; their request was much more humble. They came, in the first place, to call on me, as being for the time my parishioners, and I confess I thought the early visit did credit to Mr. Caradoc's good taste and principles."

"There you're right, Doctor; it shows—it shows—that he knows what he is about, and knows his place in the world. Well, Doctor, what next?"

"In the next place they made a great many inquiries about the neighbourhood, as if they would be willing to give and take pleasure. No airs or exclusiveness about them; and naturally the chief object of their inquiries was about you, Sir Hugh."

"Well, Doctor, and what character did you give me? Did I come off pretty well?"

“My dear sir, Mr. Caradoc was not so indiscreet as to make inquiries of your character. No, no; but the object of his ambition seems to be to make your acquaintance. He asked me if you were in the habit of visiting new comers; whether, in short, you would be likely to notice them. I said the truth, Sir Hugh, that you did not in general fancy strangers.”

“Now, now, Doctor, that was too bad,” exclaimed Sir Hugh, who, whether from Mr. Caradoc’s royal descent, or from some motive of curiosity, was unusually well disposed to his new neighbours; “you shouldn’t represent me like a pigheaded old fogrum. I dare say you told them the story of that Jacobinical old brewer. Catch me visiting a Jacobin merely because he is rich!”

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Grantley, much shocked, “you surely do not suppose I am

so indiscreetly communicative with strangers. I merely said, that though you exercise the privilege of *choice* in the acquaintance you admit into your house and to the society of your daughters; yet that,—in short, I offered to mention to you their wishes, and the inquiries they had made, feeling sure their desire for good society would meet with your approval. Mr. Caradoc thanked me, and accepted my offer, saying that, as their stay in the country was but for a limited number of weeks, they did not wish to lose time. He spoke, in short, very naturally and frankly; and now my task is done.”

“ And now, Mr. Grantley,” Ellen asked, smiling, “ you must tell us whether we shall like them.”

“ And you, my dear Miss Ellen, must tell me what you like before I can answer you; you are so lately come to years of dis-

cretion, that I do not know what fancies you have brought with you from——”

“ From the nursery!—speak it out, Doctor. Let us know, Magpie, what your notions of things are.”

“ I like——” Ellen said, then paused on her definition. During the pause, whether casually or not, Colonel Ashton leaned suddenly forward and overset Mrs. Hollis’s work-basket. He was immediately groping on the floor, and apologizing for his awkwardness.

“ Well, Miss Ellen,” said Mr. Grantley, when Mrs. Hollis had recovered the severe shock the accident occasioned her.

“ Oh! I like something rather *wise*. I can’t describe very particularly, but I think I *must* have wisdom.”

“ And I think, my darling,” said her father, “ that you don’t know what you are talking about. Wisdom and folly are not good companions.”

“ Well, Miss Ellen,” continued Mr. Grantley, “ if I did not see great wisdom, I certainly saw no folly in these young men, so I hope they will be to your taste. One thing, Miss Willoughby,” and he turned to Clare, “ pleased me very much. Before he took leave, Mr. Caradoc begged me to give him the names of some proper objects of charity. They would be glad, he said, to do any little good they could while in the neighbourhood, and he thought it best always to go to the proper person, and so make sure of doing good and not evil with their almsgiving. He spoke, in short, with so much good sense and good feeling, that I was extremely gratified. Common benevolence is common enough, but to meet with thought in a young man is an uncommon thing.”

“ In short, Mr. Grantley,” Clare said, raising her quiet, smiling eyes from her

work, “you have completely lost your heart to Mr. Caradoc.”

“Not my heart, Miss Willoughby,” shaking his head, “I keep that for nearer home ; but I confess I plead guilty to the charge of having taken a fancy to him. One does, you know, even old men do sometimes, perhaps without good reason.”

“And to his friend also.”

“Mr. Leigh ! Ah ! well, Mr. Leigh is very pleasing —better looking than Mr. Caradoc, and though he said but a few words, I imagine clever also. I cannot say, however, that I took the same fancy to him. There is a simplicity and honesty about Mr. Caradoc that particularly pleases my old-fashioned taste. I don’t say that there is anything wanting in Mr. Leigh’s manners, they are perfectly quiet and gentlemanlike, but they have not the openness and

frankness of Mr. Caradoc's. I don't know," he continued musingly, "it was nothing, perhaps; but there was an expression of sarcasm on his countenance which did not quite please me; once or twice I felt as if he was laughing at us, but it might be fancy. In fact I ought to speak well of him, for he reminded Mr. Caradoc to inquire about a pew at church, and seemed anxious on the subject, which you know is not always the case with young men."

Sir Hugh felt considerable interest about the pew, and that and some other matters connected with the new comers were talked over till Mr. Grantley's visit came to an end.

Colonel Ashton, who had sat in total silence during the whole evening, then rose, and said, with a sarcastic tone totally different to his usual manner, "If Mr. Caradoc and

his friend could know that they have occupied the whole attention of a large society—three ladies inclusive—this evening, they would no doubt be highly flattered.”

Clare looked up surprised. Ellen said with a mirthful gravity, “But it would be very mortifying if they could also be told that there was one person who would not condescend to notice them even by one word of curiosity.”

“I don’t know how to feel such interest in strangers,” he said hastily; “I never do.”

Sir Hugh and Mr. Grantley looked rather ashamed of themselves, and said nothing. It was a good moment for Mrs. Hollis.

“I beg, Colonel Ashton, you will not include me among the ladies. Such curiosity is very unedifying, and where young men are concerned, I might say extremely im-

proper. It can only betray an ill-regulated mind."

Mr. Grantley looked put out; Sir Hugh, as if he did not know what to make of it; Colonel Ashton heartily ashamed; and striding across to Clare he shook hands, and wished her good night, saying a headache was no good cause for ill-temper, but if a headache might excuse it, he had had one all the evening; then nodding good-humouredly all round, he left the room.

* * * * *

Sir Hugh called at the Lodge the very next day. He was kindhearted and hospitable, and the humble appeal for his notice through Mr. Grantley, was a sufficient reason for his unusual civility, serving to conceal, even from himself, the curiosity he felt regarding the new comers. He found both young men at home; and was so pleased

with the frank and simple manners of Ralph Caradoc, and so flattered and gratified at the undisguised pleasure shown in his prompt advances, that in the excitement of the moment he gave an invitation to dine at Middlethorpe the following evening.

This hasty acquaintance was much at variance with his usual caution. His dread of Jacobinism in disguise was so extreme that all comers to the neighbourhood had hitherto been subjected to a probation of many weeks before an admission was given to the society of his house; while, during the probation, an ordeal of profoundly searching questions had been administered by himself. Partly, however, the favourable opinion of Mr. Grantley—partly, the influence of the sterling worth of Ralph's character, which shone out in every word he uttered—and partly, that men will be inconsistent,

and never more inconsistent than when consistency might be of importance: influenced by all these causes, Sir Hugh's usual caution slept; and so far from trying the faith of his new acquaintance by searching questions, the very existence of Jacobinism in the world was forgotten, until he had turned his back on his neighbours, and re-entered his own domains.

He then suddenly slackened his pace, and struck his hand on his side. “I've been a fool,” he soliloquized, “a blind old dotard. Not a question asked—they may be rascally Jacobins in disguise, and here I have given them *carte blanche*,—hang the French!—to my house. I'd better go back and speak my mind at once,—no time like the present time.” He turned his body round, but evidently not his mind; for shortly striking his side again, he continued, “No, no—no, no

—a man must not be made of suspicion ! My eyes are pretty clear, if there were anything I should see it at once. What's time ? Time's nothing. A minute is enough, if a man has his wits about him. No, no—no, no !” And he walked on till by the time of his arrival at Middlethorpe, he had amicably arranged his differences with himself.

The young men arrived at Middlethorpe before their host or any of his family had appeared. This was partly owing to Edward's impatience. Since noon he had been constantly discovering that it was time to dress.

“I don't know how you feel, Edward !” Ralph exclaimed, after they had remained for some time in silence in the deserted drawing-room,” I feel extremely awkward, something like the wolf in sheep's clothing.”

He looked awkward,—standing bolt

upright in the middle of the room. Edward had been wandering from table to table, casting on every side restless, curious glances; but at this appeal he came towards his friend.

“Do you wish to know how I feel?—feel then.” And he took Ralph’s hand and placed it for a moment on his heart.

“My dear fellow!” ejaculated Ralph, startled and even alarmed at the feverish touch, and wild beat of the pulse; “but why is this?”

“My fate hangs on this moment,” he replied; “I have cast it all on this night’s decision.”

“I would cast it on no such foolish thing,” Ralph said gravely; but Edward moved impatiently from him, and he was too wise to moralize further.

The door opened. Edward’s colour

mounted to his brow, but it was only Mrs. Hollis.

She came in with two dignified curtseys, and not till she had seated herself, and armed herself with her basket of frilling, broke the silence.

“Sir Hugh and the young ladies will be down immediately,” she then observed, “an accident to one of the garden-men detained them out beyond their usual time.”

Ralph bowed; and as Mrs. Hollis made no further attempts at conversation, silence prevailed again.

Edward touched Ralph’s arm to desire him to speak. Ralph cleared his throat obediently three times, and knit his brows in search of some proper subject; at length this novel remark presented itself,—

“We have had a fine day, ma’am; splendid weather for the harvest.”

“Remarkably fine, thank God,” Mrs. Hollis replied; and as Ralph had improvidently presented his two subjects at once, a second silence followed.

This at length was broken by Sir Hugh’s appearance, and two fair angels—so at least Edward thought—behind him. While Ralph went forward, and Sir Hugh noisily apologized for his lateness, *he* remained fixed, his eyes devouring these two. At length his gaze, keen and intent, fixed on one, and then his brow cleared and smoothed itself, and he was at peace.

When he came to himself, Ralph was saying, “It is for us to apologize, Sir Hugh, we were unfashionably punctual.”

“You could not have done a thing that pleased me better,” Sir Hugh cried with warmth; “I like everything that is unfashionable; and now let us get our introductions

unfashionably over, that we may proceed to dinner as soon as we can. There are my two young ladies, Mr. Caradoc; and, young ladies, here are the two gentlemen of whose arrival we have heard so much. Mrs. Hollis, I suppose you have introduced yourself; and now for dinner. Mr. Caradoc, be so good as to take my eldest daughter, Clare; and here is my youngest for you, Mr. Leigh; and now, Mrs. Hollis, you and I will jog along together," and so in high spirits and singular good humour Sir Hugh entered the dining-room.

Seated at dinner, Ralph felt himself as awkward as ever, and looked with dismay at the eager and animated discourse with which Edward entertained the young lady committed to his charge. Partly from natural taciturnity, and partly from natural humility, Ralph was rarely at ease where general or lively conversation was required, and had at

all times especially absented himself from the society of young ladies, to whom, he supposed, a particular kind of small-talk, of which he had no store, to be agreeable. On the present occasion the weight of a secret, and the dread of discovery, added to his embarrassment ; and as to several of Clare's attempts at conversation he replied in monosyllables, all things shortly came to a stand-still.

A glance from Edward desiring him to exert himself, at length restored him so far as to induce him in his own natural manner to apologize for his stupidity.

“ I am afraid, Miss Willoughby, I don’t make myself as agreeable as I ought ; but the truth is, besides being naturally a dull fellow, I am very little accustomed to the society of young ladies.”

Amused at his odd bluntness, Clare replied smiling, “ If it is with a young lady that

you find a difficulty, pray think of me as an old one, and I shall like it much better."

Her manner was so quietly cordial, and her voice so sweet, that Ralph's embarrassment suddenly melted like snow in the sunshine; and, as he expressed it, "after that he got on capitally."

In the course of conversation Clare thanked him for his intended kindness to some of Sir Hugh's tenants; adding that a list of a few cottagers had been made by herself and Mr. Grantley, to whom help would be useful.

"You must not thank me, Miss Willooughby," he replied, "for the fact is, I did not think of it. I hope I should in time, for I don't mean to be neglectful; but perhaps weeks might have gone by before I should have done any good, if it had not been for him," nodding to Edward. "If any thanks are due, you must give them there."

Clare turned a curious observing glance on Edward, who was engaged at the moment, in eager conversation with her sister and Sir Hugh; then said smiling, "I don't know why I should feel surprised, but I do."

"There's no cause for surprise, Miss Willoughby, it's his hobby."

Seeing her look at Edward again, as if she was correcting some impression of his character, he added, "I don't mean to say that he is anything of a missionary—going about doing good—though I never should be surprised if he took to it; what I mean is that all his life long he has been dreaming of the wrongs of the lower classes, and doing what he can to raise them up. In some ways he carries things too far. I sometimes tell him," he continued, growing eager as he spoke, "that he dreams and dreams till he sees wrongs where there are none; and my belief is"—here, however,

Ralph became suddenly aware that he was on dangerous ground, and forgetting what he was about to say, and doubting as to what he ought to say, he lost his head in a maze of perplexity, and came to a full stop.

Edward's quick eye saw that something was wrong. "What are you saying about me, Ralph?" he said calmly, turning at the same time such a warning glance upon his friend, that poor Ralph exerted the force of a giant in recalling his senses from their bewilderment.

"I was only telling Miss Willoughby," he replied with tolerable readiness, "that you were anxious to improve the condition of the poor."

But Sir Hugh caught at the word. "Improve the condition of the poor!" he shouted; "who's talking about that? You, sir?" and he darted an angry glance at Edward.

“ And will you be so good as to inform me, sir, what you see in the condition of the poor that requires to be improved ?”

“ Nothing here, sir,” Edward said respectfully.

“ Oh ! nothing here ! Well I’m glad of that. But let me tell you, Mr. Leigh, it’s all fiddle-faddle. The poor don’t want to be improved ; they are happier as they are : it’s your rascally demagogues that put ideas of improvement into their foolish brains. Preach about improvement over the seas, if you please, but let England and Middlethorpe alone. They like themselves as they are— they don’t want any of your cursed improvement.”

“ I will obey you,” Edward said playfully ; “ and I shall obey you easily, as far as Middlethorpe is concerned ; for if I were to search for grievances, I don’t think I should find them.”

“ Well, I think not either,” Sir Hugh replied, mollified by the good temper of his adversary; “ and I beg your pardon, Mr. Leigh, if I have spoken with too much heat; but you must know I’ve no patience with reformers of abuses, and improvers of mankind. Talk of the wrongs of the poor, and then comes Tom Paine and the “ Rights of Man.” Then comes the world turned upside down; then comes Robespierre and bloodshed and immorality.”

“ And Atheism,” suggested Mrs. Hollis.

“ Very true, Mrs. Hollis, and then we come to the end of all things. But I beg your pardon, young gentlemen, if I speak with too much heat. A man can’t be cold on subjects like these. You must know there are four things I hate like the devil. First, there’s the reformation of abuses—better hang your grandfather at once, there’s no diffe-

rence ; then there's Bonaparte ; then there's this cry about education—poison, that's my word for it ; and last of all"—growing warmer and warmer, and thumping his hand on the table—"I hate my cousin, that young rascal, Edward Willoughby."

A dead silence succeeded this speech. Edward was sitting with the full blaze of the setting sun streaming on his face. It spoke well for his powers of self-command, ill perhaps for some other qualities, that he maintained a countenance utterly unmoved. Not so, Ralph. He coloured crimson ; stooped his head over his plate, and began to eat with the ferocity of a ploughman, to conceal what, had attention been directed to him, could not have been concealed.

A greater degree of embarrassment would probably, however, have passed unnoticed. Sir Hugh and Mrs. Hollis were too much

delighted with the sentiments he had expressed to give time for suspicions or observations, and the two daughters blushed and looked down. On Clare's countenance there was, besides the expression of regret in her father's open avowal of enmity, an expression of pain also, which Edward was cool and collected enough to observe. His eyes rested upon her with an inquiring earnest look, and the direction of his eyes at length attracted those of Sir Hugh.

He only laughed heartily, however. "Ha, ha ! What's the matter, Clare ? That young lady, Mr. Caradoc, does not approve of all my sentiments. She would put a muzzle through my tongue if she could ; but she's wrong, and I am right, and so she will own one of these days. It is not often I hate a man. When I do I know there's a good reason for it. But I beg your pardon, young ladies and

gentlemen, for my heat; and will behave better for the rest of the evening.” And good-humouredly bowing all round, he changed the subject of conversation.

For discourse of a quiet kind there was not much opportunity. Sir Hugh loved to talk when he was in the mood, and this night, excited and interested, his tongue moved volubly. Sometimes hearing wrongly, sometimes rightly, he dropped his quaint remarks on every side, and made the party easy and merry, if not witty and wise. So long as sleep kept at a distance, so long he kept up the flow of his discourse; but when uncontrollable sleep began to approach, he arranged the movements and occupations of the company, as it was his custom to do.

“Now, little Ellen, get your backgammon. That young lady, Mr. Caradoc, can’t be happy without her backgammon of an even-

ing. Will you challenge her for a game? It's an old Welsh game, and you ought to play it."

Ralph rose slowly from a seat he had taken as near to Clare as he could, with whose quiet manners he felt more at ease than with her livelier sister.

"I won't refuse to try," he said; "but if Miss Willoughby can get a better adversary, I would advise her to do it. I have not played these ten years, and I shall cause her but inglorious victories."

"Will you take me instead of Caradoc?" Edward inquired; "I will promise you, if not a glorious victory, at any rate a not inglorious defeat."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Leigh, you play with Ellen, that will do much better; and Clare, my darling, go and jingle on the harpsichord something soothing while I take a nap, and

then we'll have a fine 'Hailstones' afterwards." And before the words were well out of his mouth, he was in a profound sleep.

Clare went to the pianoforte and Ellen for her backgammon. Ralph followed Clare to assist in her arrangements; but Edward stood in a reverie, not only omitting to offer his services in carrying a large backgammon board; but also standing idly by, while Ellen cleared a table and moved it forward for the game.

When her preparations were made, she looked at him surprised and a little disconcerted, then, half laughing, said, "If you had rather not play, Mr. Leigh, pray don't do it out of civility. Papa thinks that I *really* cannot be happy without backgammon, but I am not so bad as that; besides—"

But Edward was already seated at the table, and making up by present eagerness

for past neglect. “I was thinking—” he began to explain;—“but I will tell you another time what I was thinking of. I am anxious now to prove the truth of my boasting words.”

Edward was a skilful player, and Ellen, accustomed to the humdrum warfare with her father and Colonel Ashton, grew eager and excited in the game. While thus occupied and unconscious of what passed, Colonel Ashton entered unperceived by the window, and quietly saying, “How d’ye do?” to Mrs. Hollis, sate down by her side.

Presently Clare saw him, and came across the room with her usual cordial kindness to greet him. Thus roused to the sense of his presence, Ellen rose for an instant, hastily held out her hand, and sate down again. Colonel Ashton said nothing, but remained leaning his head on his hands in grave meditation.

“Hullo, Ashton—you here!” exclaimed Sir Hugh, before his eyes were open, with the quick perception of the presence of his friends on which he prided himself. “I beg your pardon for receiving you in my sleep. How long have you been here? Pray, Miss Ellen, why didn’t you call me up?”

“Thank you, Sir Hugh, there was no need, I could wait,” was Colonel Ashton’s reply, in a very quiet tone, not without sadness.

Ellen turned round. “Oh! Colonel Ashton,” she exclaimed, “I hope you did not think me uncivil. The fact is, Mr. Leigh does play so wonderfully well—I don’t mean this for a compliment—that I am obliged to give my whole mind to the game, or I shall be disgracefully beaten.”

“I hope, Miss Ellen,” he said kindly, “you and I are too old and too good friends to talk of civility.”

Ellen looked uneasy, and no longer giving her attention to the game, rattled away at random, and was ignominiously defeated. Edward glanced at both countenances with an observant glance, and apparently made some note on the tablets of his memory.

Preparing, however, to renew his warfare with his companion, he was again arranging the men upon the board, when arrested by a question—"Are you fond of music, Mr. Leigh?"

"I ought to say yes," he replied ; "but as I am not quite sure, I can't do so. I don't know."

"You don't know?" Ellen said, laughing, her attention caught again.

"Music is a large term," he said. "When I am asked that question I am always perplexed."

"It seems to me a simple question. Every-

body likes one thing better than another ; but you must know whether you like to hear music or not."

"Indeed I don't know," he replied ; "I often ask myself the question, but I never get an answer. Perhaps you will decide it for me. Some sounds I like and some I don't like ; some music pleases me, some not only does not please but irritates and annoys me ; and I wish you to observe that I am not speaking of bad and good, but of real sweet sounds of music, such as Orpheus might have played ; and now, do I like that thing called music, or do I not ?"

"It is certainly a more difficult question than I expected," Ellen said, laughing ; "you must give me time, and I have no doubt I shall be able to come to a decision."

"What kind of music do you like, Mr. Leigh ?" inquired Sir Hugh. "Now, I dare-

say you don't care a jackstraw for poor Clare's playing ; I dare say you want those fiddle-faddle valses and galopades that are all the fashion now ; but I won't have them in my house,—I shut my doors against them, they may go off to France, for anything I will have to do with them."

"Indeed, sir," Edward said smiling, "I quite agree with you ; valses and galopades are the very things that destroy the little patience I have ; and when you send them off to France I don't care if opera tunes go with them."

"That's capital ! " cried Sir Hugh, in his energy laying his hand with no gentle touch on Edward's shoulder. "Now, Miss Ellen, I defy you ever to think me an old fool again ! Do you like 'Hailstones,' Mr Leigh ? "

"Extremely."

"And the 'March in Joshua ?'"

“Still better.”

“Why, Mr Leigh, you and I will do together after all. Come along, and you shall have ‘Hailstones’ to your heart’s content. Clare’s a capital hand at it. Come along.” And he led him off in triumph to the pianoforte.

“Now, Colonel Ashton, will you play one game?” Ellen said, turning to him with her brightest smile: “just one, to show that you did not think me uncivil and ungrateful, and everything that is bad.”

“One or twenty, Miss Ellen, if it will please you; but you will find me a bad exchange, a worn-out soldier who will make no stand against the enemy.”

“But it is not pleasant always to be beaten,” she said, smiling. “You must come and play not too well, and give me an opportunity of redeeming my character.” And they sate down in great amity.

Sir Hugh stood behind Clare's chair, stamping with his foot and snapping his fingers; but about the middle of the Chorus he addressed a remark to Ralph, and receiving an answer that pleased him, drew him off into conversation, desiring Clare to "keep on" as he went.

Edward sat down a little behind her, and when "Hailstones," twice called for, came to a conclusion, he just rose for a minute, and said, "Do you ever play slower pieces in this style, Miss Willoughby? I am very ignorant, and can name no names; but I mean something that would do in a church—'Hailstones' would not."

She smiled and acquiesced, and chose two slower pieces by Haydn and Glück,—not church music, but grave and solemn in tone. While she played, Edward sate still and gazed at her. When these also were

finished, he rose again, and came round and leaned on the pianoforte. “ Your sister asked me just now if I liked music,” he said, smiling. “ I like it to-night.”

“ And only to-night ! ”

“ I don’t like it always,” he replied. “ Whether it depends on me or the music I don’t know. Perhaps sometimes I am too restless to listen. Did you ever feel, Miss Willoughby, as if you had lived before ? ” he added, after a moment’s thought—“ as if what passed round you was either the reality of a prophetic dream, or the shadow of a real dream ? I feel like that to-night.”

“ Yes,” she said, with a little surprise, “ I understand the kind of feeling.”

“ People say it comes from dreams—real, common dreams,” Edward said : “ if so, I must have strangely dreamed of Middlethorpe. My spirit, or my fancy, or whatever is free in

dreams, has certainly made acquaintance with you all before now."

"But are you quite sure," Clare asked, "that you need explain it by dreams? Have we never seen you before?"

"Have you?" he asked, startled.

"I don't know, but I think so. When I first saw you I thought I knew your face, and my sister Ellen thought the same."

"Where can you have seen me?" he still asked, with uneasiness.

"That I don't know; but I suppose we may have seen you formerly, when we used to go to the sea-side every year;—at Brighton or Hastings, or in the Isle of Wight."

"I suppose it is possible. But," he added playfully, "I would rather refer our acquaintance to the land of dreams. Will you accept the acquaintance we began there?"

"I will, certainly," she said, in the same tone.

“ But perhaps,” he continued, “ you don’t know what you entail upon yourself by that admission. In my dreams our acquaintance must have made some progress; for I do not and cannot feel like a stranger here. I may therefore offend by a familiarity which, according to my own sensations, is not justly offensive.”

Clare only laughed. He surprised her; and she did not quite know how to answer him. What he said *might* have been considered impertinent, yet from his manner no one could have called it so. “ Do you stay long in this part of the country?” she inquired, after a moment.

“ The Lodge has been taken for two months; and unless Caradoc turns me out, I intend to remain till the last moment. You must be very fond of Middlethorpe?”

“ I ! Oh ! yes,”—with warmth.

“ Even from the little I have seen, I feel

I would willingly live and die here. There is something about it that, even on a first acquaintance, wins one's heart: so fresh, so bright, so peaceful—in short, so *English*."

"Have you been much abroad?" Clare inquired, not quite knowing what to make of her companion.

"Enough to make me appreciate England, and worship it with all my heart."

"That will please you, papa," Clare said, turning as she heard her father's footstep behind her; and she repeated in quieter terms what Edward had said.

"That it does, Mr. Leigh," Sir Hugh said, heartily. "I ~~never~~ can disagree very much with a man who appreciates England as he ought. I am very glad to hear you speak as you do, and I hope we shall soon be better acquainted. I am sorry to say Mr. Caradoc says it is time to go. Good-night to you

both. I hope you will use no ceremony, but make a short cut across my garden into the high road; it will save you half-a-mile. My servant will direct you."

Colonel Ashton stared, for this was a privilege accorded only to the old friends of the family; but Sir Hugh had taken a fancy to his guests, and when that was the case there were no bounds to his good-will.

As they stood in the garden, Edward and Ralph paused at a distance from the house, to look back.

At the end of a long avenue stood an old arch, covered with ivy of a very ancient date; and when this arch was passed through you stood at once in the garden, the pleasure-grounds on all sides surrounding the house. The house stood in the midst. It was built in the usual style of old English country-houses; and though its beauty was not sin-

gular, yet beauty and picturesqueness it had in a degree, especially in the moonlight. The quiet beauty and charm of the place was, however, in the garden facing the south front, and this beauty was owing to a peculiarity of natural position. A broad green lawn, of about half-a-quarter of a mile, was cut exactly in the middle by a rivulet, on the sides of which bright flower-beds, tastefully laid out, sloped even to the margin. A gravel walk encircled the whole lawn, passing over the rivulet on each side of the house by two stone and ivy-covered bridges, of the same date as the arch. Nothing could be prettier than the situation; and the most had been made of it.

On this scene, shining in the moonlight, the new-comers paused to gaze. Both had taste for natural beauty; both were excited; on both the stillness of the evening, broken

only by the soft rippling sound of the river flowing along, came with a soothing attraction. Both loved the peace and domestic happiness into the midst of which they had been admitted that evening,—the one with the deep love of experience, the other with the brighter love of fancy and thirsting desire. Both stood, therefore, in silent admiration and thoughtfulness, till Ralph, putting his hand within Edward's arm, drew him on.

“Well, Edward,” he then said.

“Well, Ralph,” was the reply.

“Why, my dear fellow, how do you feel ? are you satisfied ?”

“Quite satisfied.”

“A man might be happy with either of those young maidens, Edward.”

“Yes,” he agreed.

“There is no question which is the prettiest, I suppose ?”

“None whatever, I should think,” Edward replied readily.

“I rather admire Miss Willoughby, myself; I rather like those sweet, pale faces; but that’s a fancy of my own. That other young girl is like an angel’s child. I never saw such blue eyes and such blooming cheeks; and then her smile reminds me of nothing but a sunrise in Wales.”

“Really, Ralph,” Edward said laughingly, “you are so poetical that you reduce me to silence. As I can’t say anything so pretty I had better hold my tongue.”

“I say, Edward,”—with a grave shake of his head—“we must make no mischief in that happy home.”

Edward coloured, and a cloud overspread his brow. “Don’t talk of that, Ralph,” he said, “we’re in for it now. There’s no drawing back, if one wished it—none.” Then

in a livelier tone—"We must not be faint-hearted, Ralph; 'none but the brave, none but the brave,'—I suppose you can finish my quotation. But come along, don't let us dawdle in this way." And withdrawing his arm, and just so far preceding his friend as to preclude conversation, by the light of the moon, over hedges and ditches, he led the way home.

CHAPTER V.

“ He dared the most destructive things advance,
And even prayed for liberty to France.”

CRABBE.

THE favourable impression made by the young men was doomed to meet with some diminution.

A day or two afterwards, Sir Hugh was walking with his daughters in the neighbourhood of the Lodge. They were seen by Ralph from the garden, and he and Edward went out to persuade them to come in and rest. Sir Hugh scoffed at the idea of rest for any of the party, but acquiesced in the

proposal without much reluctance, observing, “Little Ellen has the organ of curiosity, she will like to poke about.” (It was his custom to find excuses for his own wishes in the presumed fancies of others.)

On reaching the garden, Ralph began to point out some imaginary improvements which some future imaginary tenant might make in the arrangements of the Lodge. He grew eager over them, and perhaps in a slight degree tedious. Ellen listened for a little while, then turned away to inspect more at her pleasure the garden and a pretty mazy wood which enclosed it on one side.

“You do not like descriptions, I see,” Edward said, laughing, and joining her. “If you will let me conduct you I will show you some pretty spots.” And they wandered away together.

Sir Hugh, perhaps sharing in Ellen’s feelings, was making all the time observations

with his own keen eyes. In the course of these observations he darted his glances into the little drawing-room, and on a table in one corner perceived a large number of newspapers. Now Sir Hugh had a passion for newspapers. He put his trust only in his own, and all others were judged according to the degree in which they assimilated their contents and opinions to that standard ; but whether to approve, to compare, or to condemn, he had no pleasure so great as to pore over the contents of any and every paper that came in his way. His own was his fund of sober enjoyment, a stray paper was his dissipation and excitement.

The unexpected treat he beheld immediately brought some sensations of weariness to his limbs. Sir Hugh was always sincere, and did truly believe that he had become suddenly tired of standing. He apologized

to Ralph, begged him not to put himself out, but requested leave to go and rest himself in the drawing-room while he showed to Clare the remaining beauties of the garden.

Clare was surprised; but knowing Sir Hugh always said exactly what he wished, she prevented Ralph from making his over-anxious opposition to his going in alone, and they remained in the garden.

Had Edward known what was going forward, his readier wit and more vigilant eyes might have prevented what followed; but Ralph thinking only of Sir Hugh's repose, suffered him to take possession of the room without fear or dread. Cause for fear however there was. Among the papers were a class of publications which Edward had once read with eagerness, but of late years had continued simply from a lingering interest in persons with whom he associated, and opinions of which he approved, no more.

These papers were cleverly written, but no amount of vigorous writing or originality of thought should have reconciled any well-thinking mind to the low morality and vague religious and political speculation for which they were distinguished. It had been one of Ralph's great objects to dissuade Edward from taking them, but Edward was wilful. It was the chief fault of his character that he was so. Advice usually had the effect of putting him on the high horse of determined opposition. To the perusal of these papers, among others of a very opposite description, Sir Hugh now sate down.

Clare and Ralph meanwhile remained in the garden, and from improvements and plans their conversation had turned—in the inexplicable way in which conversations will sometimes turn—to the character of Edward Leigh.

“ You allow him to be your master, then ? ”

Clare said, smiling at the simplicity with which Ralph betrayed the entire subjection under which he lived to the will of his younger companion.

“I believe I do,” Ralph replied, smiling also; “or if not my master, I am sure there is no one on earth, except my father, whom I care to please as I do to please him; and I am not ashamed of it; for though I am older than he is, and though on many points I differ from him, he has one of those characters which rule, one hardly knows why.”

“Do you mean from talent?” Clare asked with interest.

“Yes, Edward is clever—certainly very clever—and yet I don’t know if that is really what I mean. He has a very peculiar character. I don’t know how to explain what I mean, but I know when Edward says a thing is to be done I bow to him. I can’t help myself.”

"I think I see why—is he not very enthusiastic?"

"Yes, Miss Willoughby, that is just it. What he says comes from the depths of his heart, and then besides he has an iron will; so between the two there is no withstanding him." After a moment's thought he went on: "He has a peculiar character, and does not always do himself justice. He has, at times, a sarcastic way of speaking which misleads strangers; they think him cold, and bitter, and scoffing; but I, who know him well, and who have known him from a child, know that the warmth is natural, and the coldness only from circumstances. He has the best heart, the most generous disposition, man ever had."

Clare listened with interest, while Ralph enlarged with warmth on Edward's character; but there was something in her mind which

he did not suspect, an idea, the cause of her interest, which, unless perceived, might throw him off his guard. It was this idea which made her ask if Mr. Leigh had been led astray by political opinions.

“Yes, Miss Willoughby,” he replied readily, “Edward is, as I said, enthusiastic, and he sees truth in dreams of systems, where a man of plain sense sees nothing but delusion. But he is growing wise as he grows old. Edward will be a sage yet.”

“I think it must be a fortunate thing for Mr. Leigh that he has a friend like you,” Clare said, with perfect simplicity, and with a something of regret in her voice, as if another thought was in her mind.

“I think it is,” Ralph as simply replied; “I have none of Edward’s brains, but I have a cool head, and that is always at his service. I sometimes wish that I was wiser, that I

might advise him better—and more stubborn, that I might hold my opinions, when they are good ones, more stoutly against his—but what can't be done must be let alone, and what I can do I do."

Clare liked this devotion to his friend: that she did might be read on her countenance. Ralph saw it, and answered it.

"I don't speak boastfully, Miss Willoughby, of my affection for Edward—he has done more for me than I can repay. When we were both boys I made a vow to myself, that my time and whatever mind I had should be at his service all my life long. Shall I be tedious if I tell you a tale of our school days?"

"No, indeed," she replied, with such evident interest, that Ralph went to his tale with zest.

"I tell anecdotes badly, Miss Willoughby,

and Edward often tells me I am prosy, but you will be good enough to excuse. We were at school together, a large school in the north. I was a big boy, and Edward a little boy. I was slow, but plodding and industrious ; Edward quick, and lively, and giddy ; always doing well if he pleased, but often in disgrace ; not very fond of authority—Edward never was—but a noble, generous, well-principled boy. I don't know how such antipodes as we are came to be friends, but we were great friends ; and though I had been two years at school, and by my plodding had managed to keep my place, while Edward was in a lower class, still we were a great deal together. It happened that a visitor at the school offered a prize to the boy who wrote the best theme on the Political History of Rome, the causes of its rise and decline. Any boy was at

liberty to try, but it was supposed to be offered only to the upper school. I had always been fond of Roman History, and though it was a large subject, and my powers were small, I thought I would try for the prize. I said very little, but all my leisure moments I gave to my theme. I suppose patience and perseverance can do a great deal, for at last my theme was finished—and finished, I may say even now, tolerably well. I was like an old fool about it, so elated and so proud ; and the evening before the prize was given I called Edward into my room, and begged him to hear it. He came and listened very kindly, though I remember now how flushed his cheek was all the while. He made a few remarks, too, hints for improvement, and they were so wise, that I said, ‘Why, Edward, it was a pity you didn’t try your own hand at it.’

He laughed, and, I remember now, turned from the subject ; but I was full of my theme, and never thought of him any more. Well, Miss Willoughby, I gained the prize, and my brain was quite turned with my own pride and vanity, and the praises of the master and congratulations of the boys. A day or two afterwards, a boy who slept in Edward's room said to me, ‘Can you tell me, Caradoc, why Willoughby?’ As soon as the word was out, poor Ralph stopped, coloured, stammered, then incoherently began to apologize. ‘I beg your pardon, Miss Willoughby,—I am sure I beg your pardon — what must you think of me?’ ”

“Why, Mr. Caradoc,” she said, laughing, “what can it matter? Pray go on.”

“Where was I?” he said, looking bewildered, and feeling convinced he should

repent his indiscretion—"oh! it was why Edward—why Edward Leigh,"—bolting out the word,—“gave up trying for the prize, after all the pains he took about it. I said I did not think he had tried. ‘Oh, yes,’ the boy said, ‘I know he tried, though he never said a word about it; for one or two mornings I woke early, and saw him at work as soon as it was day; and I know by the books he carried up-stairs that it was the prize he was trying for.’ If I had been stabbed, Miss Willoughby, I could not have been more shocked, for I saw it all then as plain as day. He knew his theme was the best, and after all my pride and vainglory he would not go against me. I taxed him with it; and though nothing would make him confess, Edward could not conceal in those days, and I saw the truth in every look of his face. It may seem a little thing,

Miss Willoughby, now, but such things are not little at school ; and when I have lost my memory on every other point, I shall remember what Edward did for me there."

"I should feel exactly the same," Clare said, warmly.

"And so I have been Edward's faithful servant ever since. Our ways in life have often been separate, and, as I said before, Edward has been led away by delusions and systems of which I could not approve, and in which I had no share ; but such things made no matter to our friendship; and nothing but death ever shall."

At length Clare spoke what all the time had been in her mind. "I think," she said suddenly, "from all you have said there must be a likeness between my cousin Edward Willoughby and Mr. Leigh. Do you chance to know him ?"

Notwithstanding his late mistake, Ralph's mind was so entirely wrapped in his early days that this simple question came upon him like a clap of thunder. He coloured and hesitated, then admitted uneasily, "Yes, I do know him."

"And is there a likeness?"

"Yes," he stammered, not knowing whither he was to be led, nor to what cross-examination subjected, dreading, above all things, to be brought to a decision between love for Edward and love of truth—"yes, the circumstances are the same."

Here he paused. Her father's dislike, the doubt how much her own interest was justified, and the dread of hearing anything to her cousin's disadvantage, made Clare at all times shy of questioning; but Ralph's manner had invited her confidence, and his charitable hopes regarding Edward had

excited hopes of a favourable opinion of her cousin. She was disappointed. He remained silent, and she asked no more.

A little thought pointed out to Ralph that he had lost an opportunity; but before he could decide what to say, or how to renew the subject, they were joined by Edward and Ellen.

Ellen's inquiry for her father put to flight the meditations of both parties, and all turned their steps to the drawing-room. There they found Sir Hugh sitting with newspapers about him, his cheeks flushed, his countenance agitated and disturbed.

“Mr. Caradoc,” he exclaimed, the moment they entered the room, and rising to meet them. “What have I found here, sir? Is it possible that you are a patron and disseminator of these vile papers, an associate of all the profligate and seditious scoundrels in the land?”

Ralph stood in blank dismay. What to say, and what not to say—how to exculpate himself, and not inculpate Edward—how to speak the truth, and yet to soothe Sir Hugh's irritated feelings—these were his difficulties; but while still pondering upon a means of escape, Edward came forward and relieved him.

“I must not have Ralph blamed for my offence, Sir Hugh. He cares less and knows less about these papers than even you do, and if I followed his advice I should know as little.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” exclaimed Sir Hugh, his brow clearing up; for disappointment in his judgment of Ralph’s character had added gall to his severity; “that is, sir, I am glad to know that my friend Mr. Caradoc is innocent, but I am sorry for you, Mr. Leigh.”

“ You must not suppose, Sir Hugh, that to know is to approve. I own these papers are mine, but I do not own their opinions are mine.”

“ If I supposed they were yours,” Sir Hugh said, with more seriousness than was common to his manner, “ it would be the last time you and I spoke together. I did not do you that injustice ; but let me ask you, sir, how you can answer to your conscience for giving the sanction of your name to such papers as these, and, still more, for polluting your own mind with the poison of their contents ?”

“ There is no fear of the last,” Edward said with earnestness ; “ none can know better than I do their falsehood and danger.”

“ He that touches pitch shall be defiled,” exclaimed Sir Hugh with emphasis. “ Come, Clare, let us be going.”

“ Will this please you, Sir Hugh ?” Edward said : going towards the papers, he separated those of Ralph from his own, and taking the latter he tore them across the middle and threw them into the fireplace.

“ It’s only too good a place for them, Mr. Leigh. There let them lie, and I would not stretch out so much as a little finger to save them.” He rubbed his hands with some exultation as he spoke, partly with pleasure at the destruction of the enemy, and partly with gratification at this acknowledgment of his powers of argument ; but it was only for a moment, for he added gravely, “ But what is a day—there will be fresh poison to-morrow. Come, Clare, let us be going. Refreshment, Mr. Caradoc ?” as Ralph endeavoured to make his offers heard. “ I beg your pardon, but what sort of a

dinner should we make if we set to work now. No, I thank you. Come, Clare."

"I don't know what to make of that young man," Sir Hugh said, after having walked for some way in silence. "It's a bad case, I'm afraid. I was a fool to be so friendly, but it's never too late to draw back. I give them up—I have good ground to do it; if it were a royal prince I would do the same. I give them up. I was a fool to be so taken in."

The whole way home he bewailed the delinquency of the times, so that a man had need to have a hundred eyes to guard himself against poison; and again and again pronounced his determination to make a stand against evil by shutting his doors against the present offenders.

The daughters of Sir Hugh, though so fair and gentle-looking that they seemed matter

too soft a lasting mark to bear, yet inherited from their father the power of forming decided opinions. Ellen, who was the echo of her father's character, entered heartily, though without unkindness to Edward, into all his discontent ; but Clare, half playfully, half with feeling, battled for their new acquaintance.

“What makes you stand up for them, my love ?” he inquired with some heat.

“Only justice,” she said, smiling. “I am sure Mr. Caradoc is a good man, and does not deserve to be punished, and as Mr. Leigh is his friend I think he cannot be a bad one. I never can condemn in a hurry.” In defence of her good opinion she told Ralph’s story. It had pleased her and she knew it would please her father.

“Why, yes,” he said, “I like the boy—a fine, generous-spirited boy ; but what is a

boy ? For what I know Buonaparte may have been a generous boy, or Tom Paine, or Robespierre. Many a young prodigy turns out an old fool. No, no ; depend upon it I am right. I've been deceived, but now I'm wide awake. I'll have no more to say to them."

Before he reached home, however, he left himself this loophole. "Never mind telling Mrs. Hollis about the papers, she'll never forget it. I'll have my eyes about me, but I'll wait and see before I take any step. Depend upon it if there's a plot going on I'll find it out before three days are over."

"We're in a scrape, Edward," was Ralph's remark, as he turned back to the house, having watched Sir Hugh and his daughters till they were out of sight.

Ralph's doleful countenance dispersed the uneasiness which Edward had felt. Had he spoken first he would possibly have said the

same, but opposition always excited him. If we are, Ralph," he said, laughing, "that visage of yours will sink us altogether. I never saw anything so disconsolate since we were little boys at school."

"Sir Hugh distrusts us, Edward. I don't know if you felt the change in his manner, but I did. It is a hateful thing to be suspected."

"My dear Ralph," Edward said, looking at him with regret, "I ought never to have engaged you in so crooked an adventure. I am used to suspicion, and can bear it, but you are too good for my bad world. What shall we do?"

"Don't think of me, my dear fellow," was Ralph's instant reply, all his unselfishness roused by the kindness of Edward's tone. "Let us do whatever is best for your plans. I am a fool to be so squeamish. If a man can't bear a few hard thoughts I sup-

pose he is not fit to live in this world at all. Now don't think of me any more. Let us think of what is best. What will you do?"

"On my own account nothing, Ralph. If Sir Hugh suspects us, let us live suspicion down. He will think no better of us but rather worse if we take any steps to prove our loyalty as subjects and respectability as individuals. And after all what could we do? You may, indeed, bring forward letters of commendation and recommendation from all the connexions of the House of Caradoc; but what could a poor vagabond on the face of the earth as I have been do to assert the beauty of my character. No, Ralph; let things alone. My trust is that all comes right in time when a man's intention is good."

"What will you do then, Edward?"

"Why nothing, as I said before. Let things alone; neither seek Sir Hugh nor

avoid him. Perhaps on the whole be backward and indifferent; wait till he comes to us again. Depend upon it he will not give us up. If we made excuses and humbled ourselves he would despise us in his heart. Let us bear ourselves with dignity as independent men, free to have opinions of our own, and he will come round and respect us in time. What do you say, Ralph?"

" You know best, Edward."

" I think I do on this point; and now I will tell you that you know best on others. They are vile papers, Ralph, as Sir Hugh justly calls them, and I will have no more to say to them. I felt ashamed of myself and them, when I saw them in his hands, and heartily wished I had taken your often-bestowed advice. But it is never too late to mend. I will go in and countermand them this very moment."

CHAPTER VI.

“Would that war might cease
Between our houses, and that all was peace.”

CRABBE.

EDWARD's plan was a good one. Eagerness to court him after the shock he had received, would have placed Sir Hugh on the defensive. Perceiving no over-anxiety to secure his good graces, he became anxious to bestow them. When he heard that Mr. Caradoc had called at Middlethorpe and left a card only, he felt a pang. When, on the following Sunday, he was tantalized by a view of the backs of the delinquents leaving

the churchyard as he issued from the church-door, he felt injured and disappointed. When two more days went by, and he remained unnoticed, he began to be in despair. At one moment he allowed he might have been too hasty—the next, he braced himself up to continue his warfare against the corruptions of the day, by neglect of his new friends. Duty and inclination fought hard, and duty began to lose its iron character. In this dilemma he walked down one morning to consult Mr. Grantley.

Having described in no soft or measured terms the scene that had taken place at the Lodge, he paused, and then asked doubtfully and anxiously, “ Well, now, Doctor, what do you say?—ought I to give them up ?”

“ Give them up ! Sir Hugh,” Mr. Grantley exclaimed ; “ indeed I should hardly recommend such a line of conduct. We must be just in our judgments, and in every

instance the conduct of these young men appears to be so unexceptionable, that I should be much disinclined to such an extreme measure."

"But these vile papers, Doctor? No matter how good the outside is, if there is rottenness at the heart."

"Most true, Sir Hugh; but there may be excuses. Young men will be young men. We cannot expect grey heads on green shoulders. In those papers you mention there is, I believe, a great deal of clever writing, and some truth in a mass of falsehood. We cannot expect young brains to discriminate; they may be led away. We must not be too severe."

"Well, Doctor, what you say has truth in it. Young men will be young men; and poor mortals must not be severe with each other. So you hear good accounts of these young scamps?"

“No scamps, I assure you, Sir Hugh. I hear the very best report of their conduct, and my own observation is equally favourable. I called upon them yesterday evening, after dinner, and we had some most agreeable conversation.”

“Did you, indeed?” Sir Hugh said, with a jealous pang; “and you found them at home, and living in a sober, orderly way?”

“Quite so,” he replied, smiling. Mr. Caradoc was doing his accounts, and Mr. Leigh was reading.”

“Those papers, I’ll be bound!”

“Not at all, Sir Hugh. I happened to inquire into his studies, and we had some discussion on many interesting topics in consequence. He was reading ‘Burke’s Reflections on the French Revolution.’ Nothing could be more unexceptionable.”

“Burke! why, I’ll be hanged if I have not read that myself. It’s all right, I see.

Young men will be young men. I will have them to dinner to-morrow, and you shall come and meet them, Doctor."

"With all my heart, Sir Hugh. I confess I find very great pleasure in the society of these young men. Mr. Caradoc is a thorough English gentleman, and if Mr. Leigh has, in some respects, a less solid character, I assure you he has good points also. As far as I can see, I think well of both."

"I'm heartily obliged to you, Doctor, for your good opinion ; and so now there's an end of the matter. Seven o'clock precisely ; and old Hardy has sent me some capital grouse from Scotland. You have taken a load off my mind."

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"Ah ! Ralph, who was right ?" exclaimed Edward, as the note of invitation was tossed across the breakfast table the following morning.

“You, Edward, as usual. I’m very glad it has proved so.” And Ralph’s countenance expressed unmixed satisfaction.

One dinner at Middlethorpe was like another, so far as outward arrangement went. It seemed the natural order and disposition of things, that the elder sister belonged to Ralph, and the younger to Edward, and it was an order in which both, apparently, equally readily acquiesced. When Sir Hugh, therefore, took his evening’s repose, Ralph and Mr. Grantley had followed Clare to the pianoforte, and Edward and Ellen were already at their backgammon.

In the very middle of a game the latter paused and said, as if with sudden resolution, “How was it, Mr. Leigh, that you came to have those horrid papers?”

Edward smiled at the abruptness of the question ; but instantly answered, “Chiefly from habit.”

“But is it not a bad habit?”

“Perhaps it is. I partly think so now, but I never thought so before.”

His laconic defence was so simply and quickly made that Ellen had no more to say. Her curiosity was not, however, entirely at rest; and though she could not make further inquiries, she was pleased when, after a moment, he pursued the subject.

“Did you and your sister join with Sir Hugh in condemning me?”

“I am afraid I did,” she replied. “I don’t really know much about it, and, of course, I know my opinion is worth nothing; but as far as I understand, I think papa is right; and I hate a radical and a democrat quite as much as he does.”

“But I hope you don’t apply these terms to me,” Edward said with some anxiety.

“I don’t know,” she replied, laughing.

“How can one tell? One must form one’s opinion from circumstances.”

“And circumstances, you think, are against me?”

“It comes to my old question,—why did you have these bad papers?”

“Perhaps you have formed a wrong idea of these unfortunate papers,” he said; “there is a great deal that is amusing, and a great deal that is instructive in them. However, allowing them to be quite as bad as you suppose, can’t you conceive that it may be necessary even for an opponent to read them? Would not philosophy recommend that both sides of a question should be studied?”

“I don’t know much about philosophy,” Ellen said, decidedly; “but I certainly think it very far from a good plan to read and encourage bad things.”

“I believe you are right,” he replied,

with more thought and seriousness than was usual in his conversation with her; “but I suppose I inherit the disposition of our first parents, for my curiosity is great, and I have too much indulged it.”

Ellen laid her hand upon the dice, for he looked grave enough to make her afraid she had gone too far; but before she could return to the game he arrested her.

“And Miss Willoughby,” he said, “was she also loud in her condemnation—or, I should rather say, severe? for loud I know she could not be.”

“No,” Ellen replied; “Clare defended, or, I mean, excused you. Perhaps you would not guess it,” she added, smiling, “but Clare is much more good-natured than I am.”

“I beg your pardon,” he said, smiling also, “I should guess it.”

“Why?” she asked with surprise. “I

think I seem the most good-natured. Clare is so much graver, and wiser, and better than I am, that she has good reason to be more severe."

"But I fancy your sister has something of a saintlike nature; and you know those who least want charity themselves have always most charity to spare for others. It is only imperfect perfection that is severe."

"You describe Clare exactly," Ellen said warmly. "But how have you found out her character so well, you have hardly spoken to her?"

"Some people's characters may be read in their eyes quite as well as in their words. Miss Willoughby is one of these, and if you will forgive me for saying so, yours also."

"What is my character, then?" she said, laughing and blushing a little.

He smiled, then said—

“ ‘ He that has light within his own clear breast
May sit in the centre and enjoy bright day.’ ”

She blushed again, not as giving the compliment more than it was worth, but at the prettiness of it ; and saying hastily, “ Oh, I didn’t mean to ask for flattery ! ” she began to play, and he followed her, and the conversation came to an end.

Colonel Ashton, from behind, seated on his accustomed chair by Mrs. Hollis, had been watching the game ; he here sighed, and leant back, then raising himself again, turned to his silent neighbour, and said—

“ What do you think of our new friends, Mrs. Hollis ? ”

“ What friends ? ” she said sharply.

“ Our new friends, here,” he repeated, nodding towards Edward Leigh.

“ Pardon me, Colonel Ashton ; I have not the happy facility for making friends, which

appears now to be the order of the day. With me," she added, with a sage and vehement decision, "friends are friends."

"I am half inclined to agree with you," he said, with a little shake of his head. "We will call them acquaintance, then: what do you think of our new acquaintance here?"

"To say the truth, Colonel Ashton, I don't think much about them."

"No more do I—so far, at least," he muttered, "as they themselves are concerned; but as it seems probable they will be our neighbours for some time, and as I suppose such neighbours may very possibly influence some of our friends' destinies in life, I ask you again—what do you think of them?"

After this repeated appeal to her opinion, it would have been a great satisfaction to Mrs. Hollis to be able to reply by a sweeping denunciation; but she was an honest

woman, and no love of effect ever betrayed her into saying more than she truly thought. Her sentence was given, therefore, with moderation,

“I neither like nor dislike them, Colonel Ashton. I see no great cause for censure *as yet*. Mr. Caradoc appears to be a respectable man—no trumpery about him ; and as Mr. Leigh is his friend, I suppose we must take him upon trust. There’s my opinion ; I must see more before I say more.”

“Well and wisely said, Mrs. Hollis ! Hasty decisions are foolish ones.”

“But I’ll tell you more of my opinion, Colonel Ashton,” she began again, more vehemently. “If there’s no great cause for censure, what cause is there for such violent approbation ? Depend upon it there’s always mischief brewing under sudden friendships. I never knew a harebrained fancy that didn’t

end in ill. That's my opinion, and I don't care who knows it."

"I partly agree with you," Colonel Ashton said, in a low voice. "To look there, one would think we had been acquainted a hundred years." He glanced first at Ralph, bending towards Clare, with a countenance of deep interest as she played; then gave a quickly-averted look at the eager faces of Edward and Ellen.

"A hundred, or a hundred thousand, I hope it may turn out well; but I never knew a sudden friendship that didn't bring mischief with it—never, never!" Her hand went down with a jerk on the little table near her. Sir Hugh awoke with a start, and got hastily up.

"What's that, Mrs. Hollis?—what's that you are saying?"

"I was not speaking to you, Sir Hugh," she said with dignity.

“ What ! secrets with Ashton ! Well, well, I won’t interfere, he knows what he is about. May I come here, young ones?”—approaching the backgammon table. “ Any secrets here ? ”

“ No secrets, papa,” Ellen said, laughing, “ but great disgrace ; if you don’t wish to see me humbled, I advise you to go another way.”

“ I’ll stay and help. There, there’s a good throw—sizes ; now, Miss Ellen, what are you going to do ? ”

He stood by the board, watching with interest and admiration the skill of Edward’s play ; and though professedly helping his daughter, clapping his hands with glee, when by any quicksighted movement, her best attempts were discomfited.

“ You’re a good player, Mr. Leigh ; I shouldn’t mind if I had a game with you, myself.”

“I advise you not to try, papa,” Ellen observed. “You cannot often conquer me; and Mr. Leigh is a thousand times better than I am.”

“Ah! but with him I should put my best leg foremost;—nothing like a good adversary to stir up one’s powers.”

Edward looked up suddenly, smiling, and said, “You will have the prestige of victory on your side, Sir Hugh; for I have already been engaged in one strife with you, and was conquered.”

“How so, Mr. Leigh?” looking extremely puzzled.

“About those papers,” he replied: “you thought I was wrong in encouraging them, and I have forsaken them for ever.”

“And all on my account?—to please me—Mr. Leigh?”

“No; from conviction.”

“ I’m extremely happy to hear it,” exclaimed Sir Hugh, his face beaming with delight. “ Then I did a good day’s work that afternoon? I shall think of it with pleasure on my dying bed. I tell you what, Mr. Leigh, I begin to think you and I will do together after all. There, Miss Ellen, when will you speak to so much purpose, I wonder? See how you think me an old fool again. Why, I never was better pleased in my life. I must have ‘ Hailstones’ in good earnest after this. Come along all of you, and we’ll make Clare play.”

He went to the pianoforte, and Edward and Ellen followed. They were shortly joined by Colonel Ashton, who stood by Ellen’s side.

The “ Hailstones” began as usual, according to his desire, and, as usual, had hardly begun before he drew off Ralph to converse

with him ; still, however, he beat time with his foot, and occasionally threw in a note with his voice.

“ Does Miss Willoughby play ‘ Hailstones’ every night ? ” Edward inquired of Colonel Ashton.

“ Mostly,” he replied.

“ One would not guess it to listen to her.”

“ I think Miss Willoughby plays remarkably well,” Colonel Ashton said gravely—his preoccupied intellect misunderstanding the purport of Edward’s remark.

Edward coloured ; but before he could disclaim, Ellen cried, “ I don’t think you understood Mr. Leigh, Colonel Ashton. He wondered Clare *could* play so well a thing she plays so often ; and I am sure I quite agree with him. I always look upon it as the eighth wonder of the world.”

“ You understood me quite,” Edward said, leaning across Colonel Ashton with a pleased smile. “ Thank you for it.”

There was something peculiarly sweet and engaging in Edward’s smile, when it was a genuine smile. As Clare caught sight of it on this occasion, the idea flashed through her mind that Edward might in time become attached to her sister. It was a mere thought, coming and going again, but it was sufficient to give him interest in her eyes.

The smile perhaps affected Colonel Ashton in the same manner, for shortly after he turned away, and set himself down to pore over a newspaper ; a shade of thought deeper than it had yet been, on his brow.

“ Come, Clare,” called Sir Hugh, as soon as “ Hailstones” was concluded, “ now let us have ‘ Acis and Galatea ;’ ‘ Love sounds the alarm ;’—that’s a fine thing, Mr. Leigh ;—

and 'The Flocks shall leave the Mountains'—I would leave mountains and valleys too, to listen to it."

"Is it decided yet whether you like music or no?" Ellen inquired of Edward, with a smile.

"You promised to decide for me."

"But I am afraid," she said, laughing, "I have forgotten to think about it."

"Then, without waiting for your decision, I will tell you what I think myself—I don't like music."

"I think you make a mistake. I really think you do."

"No; what I like is something else, and not music."

"What can it be?" Ellen asked, a little mockingly.

"That I don't exactly know. Something *in* the sound, but not the sound. Anything

that brings to my recollection the days of 'auld lang syne ;' or, still better, anything that transports me in a dream to another world than this. A few things have these powers, and those things I like—nothing more. That is not the love of music, is it?"

" And ' Hailstones,' " she said, smiling, " what does that do ? It is noisy enough to have great power."

His countenance changed—softened so much as to alter its character, and he said, " My mother used to play it. All these things that Miss Willoughby plays, she used to play."

" Ah !" Ellen said kindly, " I understand now."

Mr. Grantley here joined them, and while Ellen spoke to him, Edward went a few steps towards the pianoforte.

Clare had heard what he said, and when

she finished the airs her father had called for, inquired if there was any one favourite thing she could play for him.

“Would you play, ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell,’ from ‘The Messiah?’” he asked. “It is what I should like to hear, in sorrow, sickness, or death. Nothing ever came up to that in my mind.”

Clare blushed a little, then said, “I hardly like to play it in the midst of these. Will you choose something else for to-night?”

He shook his head with a smile. “Thank you for refusing me—that is friendly; but my choice would be as bad if I made another. The fact is, though all these old things please me, I care only for such things as angels sing. Not,” he continued, smiling again, and anxiously, “from any likeness in my own mind, rather, I am afraid, from the force of contrast. I pretend only to admire what is good.”

“What can you pretend to higher, Mr. Leigh?” Mr. Grantley said, laying his hand kindly on Edward’s shoulder. “You speak humbly, but your words are boastful.”

“I do not mean to boast,” Edward said. “Surely I might say something higher. Practice is better than admiration.”

“One always follows the other,” Mr. Grantley said, with some seriousness, “except in the weak and the insincere, neither of which, Mr. Leigh, I should take you to be.”

Edward coloured, for his wakeful conscience immediately inquired, “Was he not insincere, or would his life have been what it was?”

Before anything more was said, Ralph called Edward to “come and hear what Sir Hugh was saying.” What Sir Hugh *was* saying was to offer the young men his own shooting for the approaching season, and

Ralph required Edward's assistance and advice in accepting and thanking him. Some eager conversation ensued.

Left to themselves,—for Ellen had turned to Colonel Ashton, and was forcing him to speak,—Mr. Grantley sat down by Clare, and looking after Edward, observed, in a low voice, “That young man interests me, Miss Willoughby. I don't feel that respect for his character which I do for Mr. Caradoc's; but he interests me. How do you feel about him?”

“I feel the same as you do,” she replied, with ready acquiescence.

“I had a great deal of conversation with him the other night, and what he said pleased me. He talked a great deal of nonsense, that I confess; but it was a kind of nonsense that has sense of a certain kind in it. I mean to say, Miss Willoughby, that

after I left him his words recurred to my mind, and made me think. I have been thinking a great deal, and I have come to two conclusions."

Clare was always the depository of Mr. Grantley's reflections; and she waited with interest to hear them now; with more interest even than was usual to her, for he appeared to be full of matter.

" My first conclusion," he began, dividing his thoughts into heads, as was his custom in his discourses, " is that we old stagers are apt to drowse a little, and require to be refreshed by the new thoughts and healthier intellects of the young. Opinions, like other things, may grow rusty, and require to be brushed up, and if we cherish them too closely, and refuse to bring them into light, how are they ever to gain a new polish? There are, I allow, great dangers in Mr.

Leigh's opinions, great dangers in improvements of all kinds; but the thought that his conversation excited was this, as a wheel that turns all day cannot fail to accumulate rubbish in its course, so it is possible that the framework of society may at certain periods require vigorous hands and vigorous minds to rub off the dust of ages." He seemed much struck with the novelty of his thought and illustration.

"I am afraid you are going to become a radical, Mr. Grantley," Clare said, smiling with amusement. "What would papa say to hear you?"

"You must keep my thoughts to yourself, Miss Willoughby, till I have time to master them, and bring them under Sir Hugh's notice; but let me come to my second conclusion,"—and here he lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "My conversation

with that young man brought your cousin Mr. Willoughby to my mind. I felt it was possible that he might be—or rather, I should say, might have been,—for I fear it is too late now ;” and he shook his head mournfully ;—“just such another ; full of good, but wild, ardent, undisciplined, the good running to waste for lack of a wise head to guide and direct it—for lack of kind hearts to counsel and assist him.”

“ Ah ! Mr. Grantley,” Clare said regretfully, “ I have often and often thought the same.”

“ I know you have, my dear Miss Willoughby ; but it never struck me in the same forcible light until after my conversation with Mr. Leigh.”

“ But why do you say too late ?—is anything ever too late ?”

“ God forbid I should say too late in any

uncharitable sense," he said seriously ; " but my meaning was this. Mr. Edward, if all tales be true, has vitiated and tainted his mind and principles by the bad society in which he has lived ; and where this is the case it requires a repentance of a very vigorous kind, such a repentance as one does not often see, to retrieve the character, and give it back what its early years promised. Now, with Mr. Leigh, though there has been, I fear, many aberrations from what is right, though even now I do not at all feel satisfied that all is as it should be, yet there is an ingenuousness about him, an admiration of virtue, and a desire to improve himself, so natural and apparently so spontaneous and instinctive, that in spite of many little causes of disapprobation he wins one's regard and confidence. But then he must be younger than your cousin, three or

four years younger, and that makes a considerable difference where bad society is concerned?"

"Do you believe, then, all papa hears about Edward?" Clare asked anxiously; "do you believe he is wicked as well as rash and excitable?"

Mr. Grantley shook his head—a long, slow, grave shake, that said many more things than his kindness would have permitted him to put into words. It is not in a secluded life that the spirit of doubt is fostered, or that the lesson is learnt how much the spirit of doubt is, in most cases, allied to the spirit of charity.

Clare withdrew her eyes, and began to collect her music with an unusual shade of sadness on her brow. For some months, nine or ten at least, nothing had been heard of Edward; and, comparatively speaking,

little had been said of him. In this lull of the storm of condemnation, hope of his reformation had been rising in Clare's heart, and she had pictured a coming day when he might be received and even welcomed at Middlethorpe. These hopes Mr. Grantley's looks damped for the moment, and yet they were scarcely damped, before with pertinacity they sprang up fresh and vigorous again.

Clare's interest in her cousin was of a very old date. It began when she was nine years old.

A small room, opening out of the drawing-room, had been the favourite sitting-room of the late Lady Willoughby. In this room she had placed all her treasures, all the precious things brought from the home of her childhood, and all the gifts lavished upon her by a doating husband.

When she died, Sir Hugh gave orders that

her room should remain untouched, and so it had remained to this day. It was not used as a living room ; for that would have interfered with Sir Hugh's desire that it should remain as a memorial of his wife, and of her only ; but it was always open, always fresh and bright, and from childhood the children were permitted to go in and out at pleasure, so soon, that is, as they could be trusted to see with their eyes only, and to understand that there was sacredness in the order and quietness which pervaded it.

By the side of the fireplace in this room hung a frame containing ten or a dozen miniatures. One of these was a portrait of Edward Willoughby as a child. It had been sent by his mother to Lady Willoughby as a peace-offering on her marriage, and however profound was Sir Hugh's disapprobation of his cousin, and however rooted his dislike,

he was too much of a gentleman to act discourteously to that cousin's wife. The offering was accepted, and a few months before her death, was placed by Lady Willoughby with some other miniatures of near and dear relations. Whether influenced in this by the beauty of the portrait, or by a kindness of nature to which feuds and disagreements were abhorrent, none could tell. There the portrait remained, in that sacred spot, untouched by Sir Hugh.

It was on her ninth birthday that Clare dragged the old housekeeper into her mother's room to question her about her mother, and to beg for information regarding the things she had most treasured and valued. The housekeeper was an old and attached servant, and with willing interest entered into the feelings and wishes of the child.

“And who are these, Greenie?” Clare asked, using the endearing abbreviation by which Mrs. Greenwood was known to the children: “they are so pretty, and I should like so much to know.” As she spoke she undrew the green curtain which protected the frame before mentioned.

“Those, my dear, were great favourites, and, I believe, great beauties too. There is your mamma’s papa and mamma, and there are two sisters and two brothers—all dead now,” shaking her head sorrowfully; “and there is your papa when he was quite a little man, and this one is your own self, Miss Wiloughby, when you were just a year old.”

“And this one, Greenie?” with the quickness of a child to notice an omission; “who is this?—such a dear little boy—I like it the best of all.”

It was the portrait of a boy of three or

four years old, in a white frock and blue sash ; the miniature itself was beautiful, and the fair, angel-like look of the child gave it a singular attraction.

Mrs. Greenwood hesitated for a moment, then soliloquizing that it was unnatural for such near relations to know nothing of each other, replied, “That is your cousin, my dear.”

“ My cousin ! Greenie ; then why don’t I see him ?”

“ He’s a young man now, my dear, or almost a young man. I dare say he is ten or a dozen years older than you are.”

“ Then why have I never seen him ?” she repeated, looking at the old woman with a wondering look.

“ You must ask your papa, my dear,” —mysteriously.

“ Oh, Greenie !” cried the little girl, as

she turned again to contemplate the sweet face of the child, with its large blue eyes and golden hair, “I am sure he is good.”

Again Mrs. Greenwood hesitated ; but herself attracted as she looked, by the countenance of the smiling boy, she said, “Well, my dear, if he looks now as he did then, I think he *must* be good.”

“Then shall I ever see him ?”

“ You must ask your papa, my dear.”

Sir Hugh was much surprised when his little daughter applied to him with strong interest for information concerning “that dear little boy.” What he said rather excited than satisfied her curiosity. He was at the time undecided about Edward’s character. Tales of his strong opinions and enthusiastic disposition had already reached Middlethorpe; but he was then only eighteen, and Sir Hugh was ready to hope the best, and was

unwilling to poison the minds of his innocent children with needless distrust and ill-will.

His answer was this: “For some good reasons, which I can’t tell you now, his father and I are not good friends. Whether you and Edward will ever be friends, depends on *him*, not on me. If wishing will do, I wish you may with all my heart.”

And as her father wished, so did Clare. She did not picture the young man, but often and often during the remaining years of childhood, gazed at the “dear little boy,” and wished that some good chance would bring him to Middlethorpe.

At fourteen, she began to be enlightened regarding him and the causes of their separation. Edward’s career was decided, and Sir Hugh, no longer guarded, discussed and condemned in no measured terms his character and conduct. But even then Clare had

her own view of the subject. Of the dangers of his opinions she could form no judgment, but tales were occasionally related of his generous interference for the wronged and oppressed, which made her heart burn within her. As she grew older she learned better to discriminate, and was forced occasionally to own that he was wrong ; but even then the charity of a gentle and hopeful nature was warmly excited for one whom all condemned, and who, in absence, had none to plead for him.

When alone with her father, she often took his part, and Sir Hugh loving to encourage freedom and openness in his children, invariably, on such occasions, entered the lists with her. He liked her warmth—he liked the generous sentiments she expressed —above all he liked the argument in which he was always conqueror ; for her soft voice

could not fail to be drowned by his loud one, and her hopeful charity was feeble when brought to bear against the force and vehemence of downright assertions.

Such is the short history of the interest an unseen cousin had excited in the mind of Clare. How deep it was, and how largely it was mixed with admiration of his character, she did not know. Pity was the form in which it was acknowledged, pity for one who had none but her to say a word in his defence.

CHAPTER VII.

“There forth they go,—he leads her to the shore;
Nay, I must follow! I can bear no more.”

CRAEBBE.

“Do you dine at Middlethorpe to night?” Edward inquired of Mr. Grantley, a week or two after the last dinner party. The meeting was on the high road, and Edward, as he spoke, turned to walk with him.

“No,” he said, shaking his head; “Saturday is a busy day; Sir Hugh knows that, and spares me. You dine there, I gather from your inquiry.”

“Yes,” Edward said, smiling.

Mr. Grantley smiled also, and counted on his fingers, “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, &c. . . .”

“Not so bad as that,” Edward said; “not Wednesday or Friday. For the rest, as Sir Hugh is so kind as to ask us, you would not have idle people like Ralph and me refuse. I am asked,” he added, laughing, “merely as an appendage; Ralph is the attraction. He and Sir Hugh talk over the day’s shooting, with equal enjoyment on both sides.”

“You undervalue yourself, Mr. Leigh,—Sir Hugh speaks very highly of your skill.”

“I am worthless though, for all that: when I have done I have done; I have neither patience nor memory to go over my labours again. Ralph can, and does, and likes it.”

“Those who dine at Middlethorpe to-night will have a loss,” Mr. Grantley ob-

served, after a moment. “Miss Willoughby’s cold is too severe to allow her to come down. I was up there just now.”

“Ah! I thought yesterday it would be so,” Edward said quietly.

“If I were a young man,” Mr. Grantley said, a little nettled, “I should feel some regret. Miss Willoughby will be missed.”

“Miss Willoughby is a great favourite of yours, Mr. Grantley,” was Edward’s answer.

“I don’t make favourites, Mr. Leigh; I love all the Willoughbys; but Miss Willoughby is my friend. As good a friend as a man can have. Old as I am, I am not ashamed to confess that I have often found the benefit of her counsel.”

“Minds are not measured by years,” Edward said,—“years are the falsest of all calculations.”

“I believe you are right, Mr. Leigh,”

Mr. Grantley said musingly. “I believe we men of years are apt to pride ourselves too much on our wisdom and experience. However, in this case I was not speaking of mind: I do not know that Miss Willoughby is clever; but she has qualities that surpass in value the gifts of the mind.”

“ You mean moral intellect.”

“ I believe I do; you word it for me well. Miss Willoughby always sees what one *ought* to do. There is no vacillation in her mind where duty is concerned. I preach, and most truly believe, the doctrine of original sin,” he continued, smiling; “ but I confess, I often feel disposed to make exceptions in my mind. Perfection is not a favourite word, I do not, therefore, use it for Miss Willoughby; but I often fancy, that among our fellow creatures, there are a few who may be classed under the head of

‘Israelites, in whom there is no guile’—and she is one of them.”

Edward was walking along, with his eyes on the ground, listening, but without showing eager interest. He now said, “Judging from Miss Willoughby’s countenance, I should say that she was a person capable of very strong feeling. It is not among persons of strong feeling that perfection is often found.”

“How so, Mr. Leigh? would you place the perfection of our nature in the coldness of our affections?”

“*I* would not,” he said eagerly; “I mean only that it is so. What are often called perfect characters are perfect because their feelings do not overstep the common boundaries, and this has given insipidity to the idea of perfection. Ardent feelings reach a better perfection at last; but they are always stepping out of the right way, and have

many a struggle to undergo in the war between duty and inclination."

"Miss Willoughby has strong feelings, undoubtedly," Mr. Grantley said, after a moment's thought. "They have not been tried; but none can know her without perceiving them; but I believe it is on account of those feelings that I think her so near perfection. You speak of a war between duty and inclination; in her case I do not think there could be war. My feeling about her is, that her inclination is always to do her duty, and that it never could be otherwise with her, however hardly tried; that duty is the impulse as well as the principle of her life."

"That is perfection indeed," Edward said gravely.

"It is the heart without guile, or natural propensity to evil," Mr. Grantley replied.

“To do her duty to God and to her father—these two feelings rule her life, and I do not think there is much room for lower ones. Her circumstances may, and I suppose we must hope, will alter; but I believe these will always stand first.”

Edward said no more on the subject of Clare; but after a short and grave silence, began to speak of other things.

As Mr. Grantley had observed, Clare was missed at Middlethorpe. Her absence was so unusual that it broke all Sir Hugh's habits, and fretted him. He missed the mere sight of her bodily presence; missed her unobtrusive yet constant watchfulness over him; above all missed the music which had become as needful to him as daily food. Ralph missed her almost as much. During the days wherein acquaintance had been growing up into intimacy, he had never changed his seat by her side, and a

quiet, confidential intercourse had sprung up between them ; marked on his side by admiration only, on hers by admiration for his many sterling qualities, strongly blended with amusement. Neither Mrs. Hollis nor (of late) Colonel Ashton added much to the liveliness of the party ; on Edward, therefore, and Ellen, the entertainment of the evening depended. Edward was as gay and ready as usual, and was incessantly by Ellen's side, assisting her in her endeavours to rouse and cheer the others ; but Ellen was not at all herself. She was not accustomed to be depended on, or to set things to rights, and in her endeavours to please, she changed her position so frequently, and fidgeted so unusually, that Sir Hugh was almost put out of temper.

At length, in a very imperative voice, he called to her to get to her backgammon board.

“If you can’t play, Miss Ellen, at least give us some amusement, and let us have a little rational noise to drown the rustling of your silk petticoats. Now you would not believe it, Mr. Leigh, but that wilful young lady there refused to learn to play, because I would not have gallopades and such trash in my house. What is a lady made for, I ask, if she cannot soothe our souls with Lydian measures. Perhaps you wonder how I come to talk about Lydian measures, but I learnt that fine thing of old Dryden’s at school. Come, Miss Ellen, get to your play.”

“I am very sorry I never learnt, Papa,” Ellen said very humbly; “I never thought I should be so sorry.”

“Some people will not trust their betters,” Mrs. Hollis observed with asperity. “I believe, Miss Ellen, I have had occasion to remark, at least one hundred times, that the

day would come when you would be sorry ; but there is such a thing as being *born* deaf."

"Never mind, my little girl," Sir Hugh said soothingly, unwilling any should reprove but himself, "we none of us grow wise naturally. It's a thing that comes—"

"Trumpery!" soliloquized Mrs. Hollis.

"Now get to your play, Ellen. Come, Mr. Leigh, you can rattle the dice the best, give us a little spirit in the room."

They sat down to the game in their usual place, and Sir Hugh retired to repose.

One game was played, then Ellen paused, and said, "It is not a pleasant thing to make a sudden discovery that one is *nothing* ; is it, Mr. Leigh?"

"No, indeed ; very trying," he said, smiling.

"And that is what I have found to-night.

To see, or rather to hear us, anybody would have supposed that I should be the person who would be missed, and not Clare ; and yet you see how it is,—everything up-side-down because Clare is not here.”

“ You argue only from one side,” Edward said ; “ perhaps if you were away your sister would say what you do.”

“ No she would not ; if I were away, and she were here, people would not look so gloomily dull as they do to-night.” And she looked round and laughed. “ I sometimes wonder,” she continued lightly, “ what will happen when Clare marries.”

Edward smiled, then said, “ Where there are only two in a family, such a consideration must always be an important one.”

“ But I am not speaking of it in that light. I might marry over and over again, and no one would miss me. It is Clare who is so

important, and that is because she is what she is—not because she is one of two."

"I can only say what I did before," Edward replied. "You are not a good judge; you cannot guess whether you would be missed or not."

"I wish you would not contradict me," Ellen said, extremely provoked with him. "If you mean it for flattery, it is no flattery at all, for I had far rather see Clare appreciated, than have people so blind as to compare us."

Ellen spoke without thought or meaning—half playfully, half petulantly. Had she supposed Edward to have been in any degree attracted by her sister, she would have kept a better guard on her tongue. The effect of her words caught and arrested her now. A deep flush crossed Edward's countenance,—so deep, so sudden, that his quickly averted eyes could not conceal it.

Ellen blushed also. She could not help it; and for an instant both looked so conscious—so embarrassed—that it would have been impossible for spectators to give to their appearance any explanation but one.

Spectators they had. Ralph, by some unaccountable attraction, was that very moment drawn to observe them. He immediately and discreetly withdrew his glance, and pertinaciously looked in the opposite direction. Colonel Ashton, with his head leaning on his hands, had rarely withdrawn his gaze from Ellen during the evening, watching with a thoughtful and yet restless countenance the smiles she bestowed on Edward's conversation. He was watching now—gazed at her intently, then dropped his head in his hands, and looked no more.

A moment afterwards, they might have looked with impunity, for the game proceeded as before.

Sir Hugh, who had refreshed himself by a short nap, now rose to watch them, and called upon Ralph to do the same.

“That friend of yours, Mr. Caradoc,” he said, “is a first-rate hand. It’s as good as a play to see him worry little Ellen. Come, Ashton, don’t sit snoozing there. As we can’t have ‘Hailstones,’ let us have what we can get. Come and give a helping hand to your poor little friend here.”

Colonel Ashton obeyed the summons, and placed himself behind Ellen’s chair.

After a few minutes silence, he suddenly said (and though he cleared his throat twice his voice was husky), “Have you any commands in London, Sir Hugh? I am going to-morrow morning?”

Ellen looked up with a startled exclamation. Sir Hugh was aghast. People were stationary in those days. A journey was more or less an event.

“Now, what takes you to London, Ashton?” Sir Hugh exclaimed, at last; “I do believe you find Middlethorpe dull—you look half asleep. If you find us a bore, say so at once.”

Colonel Ashton shook his head and forced a smile.

“Is it business? No, it can’t be business, we should have heard about it before now. What’s on the *tapis*, Ashton? Hang the French! what does *tapis* mean?”

“I’m obliged to go, Sir Hugh; I assure you it is not pleasure calls me away.”

“Pleasure! I should think not, in this weather, and in the very height of the shooting season! So you are going away, Ashton?” —in a testy voice of interrogation, after a short silence.

“Yes; I’m obliged to go.”

“Well, then, it’s too bad of you—that’s all I can say. There I have been planning

a great dinner for next Thursday, and I depended on you for helping poor Clare to carve. So you really mean to go?"

"You can't go to-morrow, Colonel Ashton," Ellen said, looking up at him; "to-morrow is Sunday."

"So it is, little magpie! She's right there, Ashton; you can't be such a heathen as to set off on a Sunday morning. I'm a J.P.; I shall have you taken up."

"I had forgotten it was Sunday," he replied. "No; I must wait."

"Then to-morrow," Ellen said, rising from her place, "you will come and see us, and let us talk over your journey. You will, won't you?" and she looked in his face with an earnest smile. "We are not accustomed to be startled in this way."

"Good-night," he said suddenly, putting out his hand. "Yes, I will come to-morrow."

And with a bow to Sir Hugh, and little notice to anybody else, his long legs left the room.

“Ashton’s a little in the dumps,” remarked Sir Hugh. “It’s all for want of ‘Hailstones.’ I believe that poet is right who says we’re all like harp strings and want to be played upon. Ah! Miss Ellen, this is all your fault.”

“I think it is, indeed,” Edward said with a smile; and his eyes rested on her with a peculiar expression; but she was busy with her disordered men, and would not, or did not observe him.

* * * *

The two young men walked up the following afternoon to inquire after Clare. She was better, and was in the drawing-room with her father and sister.

Edward looked at her, then glanced up at a portrait over the fireplace with a smile, and

said, “We might believe that lady had come down from her canvass to-day.”

This was in allusion to the cap and lace shawl in which she had been wrapped as a guard against the cold. The picture in question was a portrait of Sir Hugh’s mother, a celebrated beauty of her day, whose beauty was revived in its grace and refinement, though not perhaps in its stately perfection, in her granddaughter.

“Why, Mr. Leigh, those are the very words I said myself this morning when she came down in that matronly dress. It’s a singular thing what likenesses there are in families.”

“It is, indeed,” Edward said: “nothing more puzzling.”

“That’s a fine picture, Mr. Leigh. I look at it sometimes for an hour together, and every moment some fresh beauty comes out.”

“I could do the same.” And Edward’s eye wandered from the portrait to Clare.

“It’s a ‘Gainsborough;’—Gainsborough was a great man, Mr. Leigh.”

“My favourite artist,” Edward said with warmth.

“Do you say that, Mr. Leigh?—why hang me if we don’t think alike on all points. It’s one of the most singular things I know.”

Edward’s eyes sparkled with pleasure at this speech. The expression was so visible that Clare saw it, and gave to it a meaning which was anything but unwelcome to her. It was not the first nor the second time that she had contemplated with growing certainty the probability of Edward’s attachment to her sister.

The idea received further confirmation this afternoon.

While Ralph and Sir Hugh were talking to Clare, Edward went to the opposite side of the fireplace and entered into conversation with Ellen. Suddenly Clare saw him stoop towards her: something passed which caused Ellen to turn away her eyes and blush deeply. Edward's back was towards her, or she might have altered the opinion she naturally though hastily formed, for his countenance was more mischievous than loverlike.

What he had said was simply this. With mysterious gravity of tone, but eyes smiling with meaning, he had inquired if any further light had been thrown on the startling announcement they had heard from Colonel Ashton the preceding evening. It was certainly, considering their degree of acquaintance, an unwarrantable freedom on Edward's part; but there was something

about him which made impertinence an impossibility, and the utmost resentment his freedom ever excited evaporated under the simple reflection “*that it was Edward.*”

All the party proceeded to afternoon church together; and after church Colonel Ashton having joined them, Sir Hugh begged the young men to turn back again to Middlethorpe; but they excused themselves and went homewards.

“Now I like that,” Sir Hugh said, looking after them, “with the encouragement I give most men would stick to one like a leech; but they know what’s what better than I do myself.”

Mrs. Hollis murmured an assent to this assertion; and Colonel Ashton said, “You think very highly of those young men, I perceive, Sir Hugh.”

“And why should I not?” he asked sharply,

for he was occasionally visited by qualms that he was a fool to be so friendly.

“For no good reason that I can tell,” was Colonel Ashton’s reply, with a half sad smile and a glance at Ellen.

She caught it, and walked along in deep thought.

On entering the garden Mrs. Hollis hurried home, and Sir Hugh followed her to see if Clare was still in the drawing-room. Ellen seized the opportunity.

“What makes you go, Colonel Ashton?” she said earnestly. “I don’t ask from curiosity. Has anything displeased you? I am very sorry if there has.”

“My dear Miss Ellen,” he said gravely, “why should there be this regret at my departure? It is very kind, but it does me harm. I should learn to know that age and youth do not suit together.”

“How can you talk of age?” she cried, half angrily; then more sadly, “I knew it was that, and my conscience tells me you are right. I have *seemed* to neglect an old friend; but if you care to know what I really feel, an old friend is more to me, a thousand and a thousand times over, than any new friend can ever be.” The deep blush on her cheek gave more force to her words than their frank and careless wording might have warranted.

“Is this quite the truth, Miss Ellen?” he said, regarding her with a fixed and serious look.

“Quite the truth,” she replied, blushing still more deeply.

Colonel Ashton said no more. They moved on in silence, till Sir Hugh came to hasten them.

“Come, Ashton, and pay your respects to

Clare; you will think her looking a little pale, but she is quite well, and Mrs. Hollis cured her. That's a famous receipt Mrs. Hollis has."

"It may be famous," Ellen said laughing; "but as poor Clare took it five days ago, and is still shut up, I don't think much of it myself."

"Well that's true, but it might have been much worse. Come in, Ashton."

Colonel Ashton's visit was shortly over; for observing that Clare looked tired, he got up after a very few minutes conversation.

"And is this to be good-bye?" she asked as he held out his hand; "I hope not."

He coloured a little, and hesitated, then said he had not quite decided what he should do, but they should know his movements.

"I can't quite make him out," Sir Hugh

said ponderingly, as he disappeared; “he’s got something or other in his head. Do you know anything of this business, magpie?”

Ellen plunged her head into a large vase of autumnal roses, and exclaimed, “Oh! how sweet! one would think it was June.”

“It looks a little cloudy though, to-night,” observed Sir Hugh, walking to the window; “I’m afraid we shall have some rain; and my glass is the least bit unsteady.”

“It really *must not* rain, papa,” Ellen said decidedly; “I *cannot* let this autumn go.”

“Ah! but, Miss Ellen,”—shaking his head with sage seriousness—“it is not us poor mortals that order the winds and storms on their way.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Such was this maid, the angel of her race,
Whom I had loved in any time or place;
But in a time and place which chance assigned,
When it was almost treason to be kind.
Then wonder not that love in terror grew
With double speed.”

CRABBE.

THE next day it rained hard. Ellen and her father walked about the house like restless ghosts, each adding to the restlessness of the other by perpetual assurances that it was going to clear.

The next morning early, Sir Hugh received a visit from Colonel Ashton, the purport of which was to ask his leave to attempt to gain the affections of his daughter Ellen.

Sir Hugh was not fond of being surprised, having a high notion of his own power of discernment, but he could not conceal his astonishment at this. When, however, he found that his daughter was prepared for his news, and willing to agree to Colonel Ashton's proposal, his joy so exceeded his surprise, that the former was forgotten, and in half-an-hour he was exulting over the blindness which Mrs. Hollis and Clare honestly confessed; and began truly and sincerely to believe that he had seen it all along.

Clare's surprise was for a moment mingled with disappointment. She now discovered how far more than she had been conscious of, the idea of Edward's attachment had been occupying her mind. There was little doubt that Ellen's happiness was more entirely safe in the hands of Colonel Ashton

than it would have been with one, restless, untried, and excitable like Edward ; but there was a smouldering fire in Edward's character, which answered to something in the nature of Clare ; and she had pleased herself vaguely and unconsciously, by thinking he might some day belong to them.

Disappointment could not, however, withstand the expression of perfect satisfaction in Ellen's countenance, and the ecstatic joy in that of Colonel Ashton. He looked like a man from whom the weight of years had been removed ; and youthful as was Ellen's appearance, there certainly was nothing unsuitable in their looks, as they stood together to receive Sir Hugh's hearty congratulations and blessing.

“ Ashton is a worthy man,” he repeated three times over to his daughter ; “ and that's why I am happy. This world's goods

are very well, and I am not the man to say a word against them, but they are nothing but the chaff in the wilderness, when weighed with worth and truth, and honour and goodness. So God bless you, my darling, for giving me a worthy son."

In the course of the afternoon, Edward Leigh called at Middlethorpe. On being told that Sir Hugh and the young ladies were out, he sent up a message to Mrs. Hollis to say he had called to ask if she would be kind enough to copy out her receipt for the influenza, as Mr. Caradoc was very unwell with it.

The servant took up the message. Before he went, he begged Edward to wait in the drawing-room till Mrs. Hollis came down.

When the door of the drawing-room closed, Edward placed himself, with folded arms, to contemplate at his pleasure the portrait

before mentioned. “Less perfect,” he murmured; “but more lovely—less of self and earth—more of love and heaven.”

The words were lingering on his lips, when the door in the panel leading to Lady Willoughby’s room, opened, and Clare appeared. He had never perceived the existence of the door before; and at this unexpected entrance he looked so bewildered that Clare came towards him laughing.

“I beg your pardon,” she said; “I did not know you were here.”

“I beg yours,” he said; “but how are you here?—where do you come from? I believe I ought to beg it again,” he continued, laughing, “for such an impertinent question; but I never saw that door before.”

“There is a room beyond,” she said.

“I wish you would, some day, show me Middlethorpe,” he said; “I like old houses

like this, and have a passion for nooks and corners."

Clare turned a few steps back to the door. "Do you like to look at this one now?" she said, acting on a momentary impulse—for Lady Willoughby's room was not usually shown to strangers.

"I should like it of all things," he replied eagerly.

She led the way, and he followed; but as he entered the room, curiosity and every lighter feeling died, and awe fell upon him. The room was bright and cheerful—the sun shone in with a full light, and streamed on gems of art and porcelain—yet there was something in it, something even in its brightness and freshness, something in the precision of its arrangements, that touched the fancy: marking it as the treasured possession of one who could possess it no more.

Edward looked at his companion—looked

around him and was silent. His memory flew back, and he recalled an early death in the springtide of happiness—a death over which his own mother had shed tears of pity and regret—and the softness of kindness and sympathy stole over his countenance.

Struck by, and grateful for the quick intuition, the ready sympathy he showed, Clare, after a short silence, pointed to several things worthy of notice in the room. Then undrew the curtain which hung before the frame of miniatures, and invited him to look at them. “They are very pretty,” she said ; “and I believe some of them are *really* valuable and beautiful.”

He approached, and his eyes fell upon himself. The original of which this miniature was a copy, had been on his mother’s table by day, and by her side at night ; and

since her death had figuratively been buried with her, for the elder Mr. Willoughby had shut from his eyes all things that reminded him of his wife, in a vain endeavour to banish his regret at her loss. Days of happiness rose before Edward's eyes as he gazed : his mother's love, his youthful home, his childhood's innocence ; and forgetful of all but that slumbering, yet not forgotten, past, he yielded himself to the memories rushing over him, and tears fell down his cheeks.

His head was turned from her, yet Clare perceived with surprise his emotion, and in vain endeavoured to account for it. She drew a little backward, however, and suffered him to remain undisturbed. Her reflection was that human beings are made up of many and complex feelings, and none can tell how or why another is affected.

Edward soon roused himself, but he

was still under excitement; and turning towards her he pointed to the miniature, and said, "Is it not a sad thought that man in his mature wisdom can do nothing but envy the days that are gone by?"

"That is my cousin Edward," Clare said, startled: "do you know him?"

"He is not like that now," was Edward's reply, and in his tone there was something of the passionate regret he felt in his heart as he gazed on the innocent brow of the child.

"Do you know my cousin?" Clare repeated.

"I saw that," Edward said, "years ago—it brought to my recollection days long past, but not forgotten."

"Days connected with my cousin?" she asked, and looked at him with eager interest.

"Yes, with him," Edward said, and turned again to gaze on the childish face.

“ You say he is not like that now,” Clare began again, her heart beating with anxiety; the moment was come when she was to be resolved whether her father’s opinion was just, or her own interest justifiable.

Edward looked at her; he saw her cheek flushed—her eye eager—strong interest imprinted on every feature; and he asked himself for what should he wait; why not at once throw himself upon her interest, her love, and her compassion? But at the very moment this thought with almost overwhelming force presented itself, another rose and vanquished it. This was a desire, singular, yet not incomprehensible in its nature,—to obtain her love, *as he was*, without the aid of old fancy and predilection; a jealousy of his own absent self, a wish to be loved in his present one. This jealousy was the

birth of a moment, yet grew up with such intensity, that the next instant all past emotion and agitation was overcome, and he was Edward Leigh once more.

“What do you wish to know?” he said, in a calm and collected manner. “I will tell you all you please about your cousin.”

“If you can tell me any good,” she said, “I shall be more glad than I can say to hear it; but do not tell me any ill; we have had enough of that here.”

“Good and ill,” Edward replied,—with a strong effort mastering the emotion her kind words caused him—“are mixed in most men’s lives. It is not those who seem to have the larger mixture of evil, who are always worst at heart. Ardent spirits like your cousin’s find it hard to keep the steady track; and there is such a thing as

going astray even in the very search after perfection.”

“Yes, I understand that,” Clare said. “It is what I have always felt about him. His intentions are good, but he is careless in the choice of ways and means of good. Why is it so? How can he forget that good never can come of evil?”

“He has done so,” Edward said—a tone of excitement, almost of passion, coming to his voice again—“but he will do so no more. He has set before his eyes a better perfection now, and one that cannot mislead him.”

“My cousin would be grateful,” Clare said, surprised, yet smiling at his warmth, “if he could know how warm an advocate he had.”

Edward coloured, then smiled, and said, “Some people are very combustible. They

cannot go near a fiery subject without catching fire." Then again more gravely added, "I have a right to be a warm advocate, for all the evil that can be said of your cousin may be said of me; and I hope not the evil only. If he has good desires, so I hope have I—nay, I do not hope only, I know it; desires which nothing can satisfy, but what is highest, holiest, and best."

As Edward ceased, the current of Clare's reflections changed. Her thoughts recurred to her sister, and to Edward's supposed feelings towards her. She even believed him to be appealing to her sympathy, and endeavouring to secure her favourable opinion. It was a proof of the absorbing interest excited by thoughts of her cousin's welfare, that during this conversation with Edward, her sister's marriage—which up to that moment had entirely engrossed her, ex-

citing, amid joy, many regrets and some few tears—had entirely passed from her memory.

She led the way back into the drawing-room, and sate down in silence, feeling that an unpleasant duty lay before her; but before she had summoned courage to speak Mrs. Hollis entered and joined them.

She came in armed with her receipt, and proceeded at once to business. “This is the draught, Mr. Leigh:—

“One teaspoonful of syrup of poppies,
One ditto of mendererries,
Fifteen drops of antimonial wine;
to be taken in a glass of hot lemonade. Mr. Caradoc must be careful to guard against the cold after the mixture has been taken.”

“A most merciful receipt,” Edward cried, laughing. “I wish I was ill myself.”

“I hope Mr. Caradoc will find the benefit of it,” Mrs. Hollis said, with a stateliness that rebuked his levity.

“I hope he has not much the matter with him?” Clare inquired, kindly.

“I hope not, either; but he seems very uncomfortable, and my utmost persuasions could only obtain his promise to stay in bed to-day, and take Mrs. Hollis’s receipt, if she would give it. You must know, Ralph has a horror of a doctor, and puts implicit trust in”—here Edward caught up the words “old woman’s remedies,” which were on his lips, and changed the expression to “simple.”

“And there I agree with him, Mr. Leigh,” pronounced Mrs. Hollis. “But what do you say to our news?—I suppose Miss Willoughby has told you the news?”

“No, not yet,” Clare said, smiling and blushing a little.

“Sir Hugh is about to lose one of his daughters, not Miss Willoughby—which

perhaps you will think a singular arrangement, being the eldest, and the best prepared for the duties of matrimony—but his youngest daughter, Miss Ellen ; and Colonel Ashton is the happy man. Miss Willoughby's time will no doubt come in due course.” Mrs. Hollis spoke with great dignity. She was delighted at the event ; but was half disposed to resent the choice of the unprepared daughter.

Edward coloured a little, as Clare perceived ; but he gave his congratulations with calmness and warmth.

“ Yes, sir, you may congratulate me,” was Mrs. Hollis's reply to his words ; “ it is, indeed, an event which gives me unfeigned satisfaction. This is a happy marriage, with no trumpery in it.”

“ Solid and happy,” Edward said seriously. “ Miss Ellen Willoughby has made a wise

choice, showing herself more prepared than you might think for the duties coming upon her ; and for Colonel Ashton, surely he is the happiest man in this world, except—” he said no more.

“ Except yourself, I suppose, Mr. Leigh,” Mrs. Hollis observed, good-humouredly ; for Edward’s request for her receipt, and his just words on the announcement she had made, had raised him some steps in her mind.

“ No,” he said, hurriedly ; “ I was not speaking of myself.” And unconsciously, with a rising colour, his eyes darted an inquiry at Clare.

She, as indeed was natural, misunderstood his look. She felt very sorry for him ; but there was nothing to be said ;—what could she say ?

A moment afterwards Edward approached

her ; and, as he held out his hand to wish her good-bye, said, with a softness that softened her more to him,—“I can conceive that this event must cause very mixed feelings in your mind ; though I do most truly congratulate you, therefore, I do it doubtfully.”

She answered him gratefully, and parted from him with a feeling of interest beyond what he had yet inspired.

Half-an-hour afterwards Edward stood by Ralph’s bedside. “How are you, Ralph?”

“Better, thank you ; except that my head aches, and my pulse seems quick, and I have rather an oppression on my chest.”

“Better ! that is much worse. Well, Ralph, you shall have your own way, and Mrs. Hollis’s receipt to-day : to-morrow, if you are not better, I will have my way.”

“Not a doctor,” Ralph said resolutely.

“Yes, a doctor,” Edward replied, with equal determination.

Ralph sighed, for he knew he was conquered. Edward sate down by the bedside, then said, “I heard a piece of news at Middlethorpe which I think will interest you. Miss Ellen Willoughby is going to be married to Colonel Ashton.”

“Oh!” Ralph said, uneasily turning a half glance at Edward’s face; then meeting his eye he looked hastily away.

“Oh! my dear Ralph,” cried Edward laughing, “is that all you say? surely my news deserved something more than that.”

“My dear fellow,” Ralph said, still not daring to look round, “I don’t know what to say, I am so surprised, so perplexed, so truly grieved.”

“Grieved! Ralph; what on earth do you mean?” And Edward bent over him.

“Don’t, my dear Edward, pray don’t—you don’t deceive me;—I won’t say anything if you had rather not, only you know what I feel.”

“That I am sure, Ralph, I don’t; unless,” he added, suddenly colouring, “you have supposed that I have lost my heart to Miss Ellen Willoughby,—is that it?”

Ralph nodded.

“No, Ralph; if it is true that I have lost my heart, it is not to *her*.”

Ralph turned his head away to conceal what came over it—a flush of pain, a shadow of unspeakable sorrow; a fabric woven by his unconscious imagination, was in one moment revealed and dissolved. He had not known till now how he had been shrining Clare in his heart of hearts; he could not speak, but Edward was deep in thought and needed no words.

Presently he said, “No, Ralph, that sunrise in Wales is beautiful enough, but no man would have a human being if he could win an angel: that is, some would as we see, but I would not, I am too weak and erring myself to do with less than an angel guide—that guide I have found if only I can win her.” And he sighed deeply.

Ralph turned round and held out his hand with a touching smile. “I understand now, Edward; and you are quite right; and you have my best wishes.”

“I know that, dear Ralph,” Edward said, warmly pressing the hand; though, in truth, he did not know how good the wishes were.

“She is worth winning, Edward.” And with difficulty Ralph repressed a sigh.

“And needs worth to win her. Oh! Ralph, if I were but worthy of her!”

“ You must make yourself so,” his friend said simply.

“ If I can--but can I? I am bold and proud enough sometimes, but at others my spirits sink. Colonel Ashton is a worthy man—I feel that, and they feel it; but what am I?”

“ You have always said,” Ralph said, with earnest kindness, “ that if you once loved an object worth striving for, there was no degree of worth and goodness you could not attain, and I think so too. You have an object now, Edward—try for it, and you will attain.”

“ How ill you look, Ralph,” Edward said, as bending forward to catch his friend’s serious words, his eye fell on his face; “ what is the matter?”

“ My head aches, that is all. I think I should be glad to rest.”

“ And here I sit talking over my affairs,

without a care for you. Oh! man and his selfishness! Well, Ralph, you shall rest now, while I prepare your potion for you; and if you are not better to-night, a doctor to-morrow."

Ralph tried to smile, then thankfully turned his head away from light and observation.

CHAPTER IX.

“Live for to-day, to-morrow’s light
Will bring to-morrow’s cares to sight.”

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR.

EDWARD’s threatening was obliged to be enforced—the parish apothecary was sent for the next day. Mrs. Hollis’s receipt was not, however, to blame for this. She had never pretended to minister to a mind diseased, and there was sufficient mental disquiet in Ralph’s mind to counterbalance the soothing effects of her prescription. He was well, however, at the end of five or six days; and if he rose from his temporary confinement a sadder

man than he lay down, none knew it but himself. When they were gone he acknowledged how sweet and bright had been the visions which like a faint breeze had been playing about him for some weeks, and he had some struggle to yield them up. But the week's labour accomplished the task ; when he came out again with his body restored, his mind had as entirely separated itself from all thoughts of Clare, as if they had never existed. It may seem that it was an ignoble passion which could thus be yielded up at the will of a friend ; but Ralph thought otherwise, he gave his will to the struggle and came off conqueror, as, indeed, must be the case when the will is perfectly sincere.

Edward refused to leave him, or to pay any visits during his illness. They were not, however, entirely cut off from the world, for Mr. Grantley came often, and Sir Hugh once, to see them.

In the course of Sir Hugh's visit, which was about the third day of Ralph's illness, he surprised them by saying that Ellen's marriage was to take place in three weeks.

“And why not?” he said, in answer to their expressions of surprise; “what is the use of dawdling in a world where time goes fast enough? when a thing is to be let it be. I'm no friend to your long courtships, Mr. Caradoc; they fret the body away, and as to the mind, they make it of no more use than a piece of packthread! I'm no friend, let me tell you, to excitements—another word for madness. I like people to do their duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them; and when a young woman is called to be a wife, why let her set about her duty as fast as she can. I would have the marriage next week, if Clare would let me.”

“Miss Ellen Willoughby is young to begin life's duties,” Ralph said with a smile.

“Not a bit, Mr. Caradoc. She’s got a good husband, one of a thousand, to teach her; and she’ll do her duty as well as the oldest of us. There will be nothing very tough, I fancy”—shaking his head—“Ashton would give her flowers to walk on if he could.”

When Ralph had recovered himself sufficiently to leave the house, the young men walked up to call at Middlethorpe. They found Sir Hugh and his daughters, with Colonel Ashton, in the garden. The weather, this autumn, was singularly beautiful; and it was rarely that anybody was at home. Ralph met Clare with perfect self-possession, acknowledging to himself how idle he had been in dreaming dreams, and asking himself, in the fulness of his humility, if such an awkward fellow as he was had any right to think of one, outwardly as well as inwardly,

so nearly akin to an angel. Occupied with Ralph, Clare turned away her eyes from the meeting between Edward and her sister. When they all stood together again, Edward was, as she acknowledged, quite himself—playful, easy, and unembarrassed. She felt pleased and relieved, yet now and then in his conversation she fancied she discovered the traces of a late disappointment.

The young men had interrupted a discussion that was taking place, and Sir Hugh shortly recurred to it, desiring Clare to explain the subject under review while he went to speak to a person on business. She did so, stating simply that Sir Hugh wished to give a ball, and asking their opinions on the subject.

“A ball!” Edward exclaimed discontentedly; “oh! not a ball.”

“Why not?” Clare said, smiling at his tone.

“I should as soon have expected Adam to

give a ball in Paradise,” he said;—“a ball at Middlethorpe ! I could not stay to see such desecration.”

“ Anything—that is any innocent thing—that makes people happy is a good thing, Edward,” Ralph said with warmth; “and as a ball often does make young people happy, a ball is a good thing.”

“ My dear Ralph,” he replied a little impatiently, “ I did not mean to enter into a philosophical examination of a ball. Everything is good in its place ; but I cannot bring myself to think of the quietness of Middlethorpe disturbed with the world’s vanities. It pleased me to think that there was a spot of ground where they had never penetrated, and some human beings that had never wished for them.”

“ This is one of Edward’s monomanias,”

Ralph said, almost apologizing for his friend ; “it is no use to argue with him now.”

“I am afraid I and Mr. Leigh do not agree very often,” Colonel Ashton observed—some old jealousy causing the observation, for, in fact, they had seldom had reason to agree or disagree ;—“but I confess I have a feeling with him now. There are green and shady places in the world, where flowers grow, which have a something garden flowers do not possess.” He looked right before him while he spoke, thinking that he thereby avoided any application to his own Ellen. “Perhaps I do not make my meaning very clear as regards this ball ; but, if I mean what Mr. Leigh means, he will understand me.”

“I do,” Edward said eagerly ; “and thank you as I always thank a person who understands me.”

“Then the ball is not to be,” Ellen said, laughing; “Mr. Leigh has decided against it.”

“Do you wish to have one?” he asked, turning quickly towards her.

“No, not the least—that is—not now;—except that papa seems to have set his heart upon it. Clare and I were arguing against it when you came.”

“Well,” asked Sir Hugh, returning, “what have you decided?” He looked at Edward as being the youngest and the most hopeful.

“My decision,” Edward said, smiling, “is against a ball; but Ralph desires to dance.”

“No, my dear Edward,” Ralph remonstrated gravely; “I never do dance, and never cared about it. I only speak because I don’t like things that give happiness to be run down. I should be better pleased without one.”

“Everybody is against you, papa, I am afraid,” Clare said, smiling; “even Mr. Caradoc only likes balls in the abstract.”

“It’s a very remarkable thing,” Sir Hugh said ponderingly, “but if an old man wants to give pleasure, the young, now-a-days, are sure to set themselves against it. I can’t understand it. There must be something wrong at the bottom.”

“So far as Ralph and I are concerned,” Edward remarked, “we ought to be excused from such a reproach. Our dancing days are surely over.”

“Why, how old may you be, Mr. Leigh?” Sir Hugh asked sharply, for nothing provoked him more than affectation of age.

“I shall be eight-and-twenty next month, and Ralph is older.”

“I don’t believe it,” Sir Hugh said; “you look nothing more than a boy. Where

is the register of your birth and baptism?"

"I don't feel like a boy," Edward said, colouring, as he evaded Sir Hugh's keen, questioning glance.

It had been, however, a mere random question; and Sir Hugh, recalled by a remark of Clare's, returned to his subject.

"Well, my love, do just as you please," Sir Hugh answered. "It would be a new thing to force pleasure down the throat like physic. Only strike out some other plan for giving due honour to this marriage. I think a man should show his joy, when he feels it in the bottom of his heart." He stretched out his hand with a cordial smile to Colonel Ashton.

Colonel Ashton shook it with warmth, without otherwise expressing his pleasure in Sir Hugh's words. He then said, "I think,

Sir Hugh, on these occasions it is better to confine the festivities to those who can thoroughly enjoy them. It has been my opinion all along, though I would not bring forward my own sober thoughts while there was a chance of their opposing the gayer wishes of younger minds. Since we all agree, I confess it seems to me more advisable to leave the music and dancing to the poor;”—in a lower voice he added, to Sir Hugh—“*they* have no drawbacks to their pleasure, I fear,” and he glanced at Ellen and Clare: “there may be some here.”

“You’re right, Ashton; and so let it be, then, with all my heart. If some are too old, and some are too sober, to dance, let the poor dance double measure. Come along, and give me your opinion as to the power of turning my big barn into a ball-room. I must be content to give a humdrum dinner

to my rich neighbours, and we'll treat them to festivities another time."

So the point was settled; and a few days before the marriage the rural festivities took place, with universal satisfaction. The humdrum dinner was appointed for the evening of the wedding-day, in order that some old friends of Sir Hugh's, who were coming from a distance, might be present.

From the date of the announcement of Ellen's marriage, Sir Hugh was too much occupied with private cares to attend upon the sports, or seek, with the same eagerness as before, the society of his new friends. He was, however, too well pleased with them to be capable of neglect, and constantly invited them to spend the evening at Middlethorpe, or to join him and his daughters in their long walks.

On these occasions, Ellen being engrossed

by Colonel Ashton, and Ralph conscientiously devoting himself to Sir Hugh, Edward and Clare were thrown together as they had not hitherto been, and they became great friends—great friends only. The intercourse between them was calm—very calm; for Edward regulated his behaviour by that of Clare, carefully watching himself, lest one word or look should betray him before his time was come.

At first, her frankness and ease, and the sisterly kindness with which, in consideration of his disappointment, she could not help treating him, pleased him. It won her to greater freedom; it enabled him to draw from her her feelings and opinions, as otherwise, perhaps, he might not have done; but very soon that which had pleased at first began to pain and annoy him. When, day by day, she met him with the same fearless frankness, happy in herself, happy in her home, happy in her

entire devotion to her father, his spirits began to be affected by it. Hopelessness began to creep over him ; he dared not make a step forward, and yet he was for ever on the brink of that step, which, if not successful, must build a barrier between them. He loved her in her calmness ; it exercised over him a species of fascination, and yet he longed as never in life he had longed before, to be the one to ruffle the still lake of her heart, to sound its depths, to call forth the force of her affections, to develop all the varied powers of her dormant character.

“ Will you try your fortune ? ” he said to her one day, as in returning from a walk they passed over one of the bridges, already mentioned as giving a peculiar character to the garden.

“ How ? ” she asked, stopping and smiling.

He spoke with some eagerness and inte-

rest ; explaining that it was by throwing a flower on one side of the bridge, and watching its fortunes as it issued on the other. “ You must not expect any definite knowledge, but this will tell you what your course in general will be ; whether rough or smooth ; or else it will prepare you for success or disappointment in any particular business you may have in hand. You laugh ; but we used to do it gravely enough at school. Will you try ? ”

She readily consented, but laughing all the while at his seriousness.

He took two flowers from his button-hole, observing, “ This white one is yours ; ” and, with a little hesitation, “ this scarlet one shall be mine. Now let us go to the other side.” He threw the flowers into the stream together, and with something of childish eagerness hurried to the opposite side to watch the result of the trial.

The white geranium, without stop or impediment, floated calmly down the stream ; the other had scarcely appeared before it separated from its companion, and drifting to the side, became entangled in weeds. Edward's countenance amused Clare.

“ See the fruits of trying one's fortune,” she said, laughing ; “ my course so even that it may be called monotonous, and yours, even at the outset, encompassed with difficulty.”

“ Ah ! but the difficulties are overcome,” Edward cried, triumphantly, as the motion of the rapid stream disentangled his flower, and carried it swiftly out of sight.

“ And now, are you happier ?” she said playfully.

“ Have you really no wish to know your destiny ?” was Edward's reply.

“ Not only no wish,” she said decidedly, “ but I would not know it if I might.”

“ You cannot, then, have any strong wish—anything you care to see accomplished.”

“ I suppose I might be glad to know that any wish I had might be granted in time ; any hope fulfilled: but, supposing it was not to be fulfilled—what then ? Would it not sadden life to have that knowledge ? It is better to wait ; and surely bearable, even if the wish is a strong one—for hope is pleasant.”

“ For those who *can* wait,” Edward said, with vehemence. “ I cannot. I hope I can bear anything that man can bear ; but I cannot bear suspense.”

“ But you are speaking of very strong wishes indeed,” she said, with some surprise, and watching his countenance with some interest—“ things really affecting your peace and happiness.”

He looked at her, saw her utter uncon-

sciousness, and with a bitter feeling only replied, "Perhaps I am."

After a moment's silence Clare moved from where they stood to join the others. Edward followed her, and as they walked along, made another attempt to search the secrets of her heart. "You called the even course of your life *monotonous*. It would not, then, gratify you to lead for ever as calm a life as you do now?"

She seemed struck by the question, and pondered on it for a moment. "Yes," she then replied, "I think I should. What seems monotonous to others is not so to oneself. But the fact is," she added, "I do not wish to look forward at all; I have a dread of it. Why should we not be happy in the present, while we may and can?"

"But why look forward with dread? What is there in the future for you to dread?"

“Who can think of what life is, and on what a thread one’s whole happiness may hang, and do otherwise than dread the future? I would rather obey the most merciful command ever given—‘Take no thought for the morrow.’”

As Clare spoke, her countenance changed, and her voice had an agitated tone Edward had never heard there before. He seemed to see something of the depths he had desired to search ; but what thought was there of him ? what share had he in the vague terrors that thus made her shudder ? He knew he had none. He said nothing, but walked gloomily on.

After a moment, Clare said playfully, “And now will you consent to leave the future alone, for me, and, if I may give you my advice, for yourself also ? except,” she added, with great kindness, “that I am sure I wish you a happy future, and that all your

future wishes may be granted.” And leaving his side, she hurried forward to her father, to relieve him of an umbrella, which a few threatening clouds had compelled him to carry.

Edward parted from her with gnawing and bitter feelings. The love which, in its early days of fancy, had excited him to lightness and brightness, now changed its nature, and became—

“A pining anguish, fretting at the heart.”

None more than Edward required the injunction of the Apostle—“Keep yourselves from idols.” His mind, vivid in its conceptions, and tenacious in its grasp, yielded itself without a struggle to the domination of a present feeling. His life had been a series of idolatries; and though they had proved but broken reeds, though in their

failure his mind had become embittered, he was still undisciplined and untaught, ready, as before, to yield himself to the power of passion, and the excitement of the day.

The effect of his present restless and uncertain state of mind was to render him a gloomy companion. In company he exerted himself, but at home was silent or irritable. Ralph, with his usual unselfishness, bore with this change of temper. He guessed the state of Edward's mind, and knew by experience something of the nature of his struggles. Instead of remonstrances, therefore, or impatience, he watched only for opportunities to forward his wishes or to administer relief.

CHAPTER X.

“ ‘ Then let us try, and our endeavours blend,’
I said, ‘ to bring these quarrels to an end.’ ”

CRABBE.

THE nature and arrangements of Sir Hugh’s property had made it necessary to apply to Edward Willoughby’s lawyer on certain points connected with the marriage settlement. This was done by Sir Hugh sorely against the grain ; but to necessity he submitted at all times like a man. When Clare heard of the correspondence that had taken place, she revolved in her mind the possibility of turning it to some good account. A request had been made by Sir Hugh, and

readily granted. This, as it seemed to her, was an opening for reconciliation.

She pondered much and for many days on this subject, and when her mind was made up, proceeded to her father's room with her request. She went with a beating heart, for she knew her task was a difficult one, and that it was impossible to guess in what manner it might affect Sir Hugh; but she had a brave spirit when anything like duty urged her on.

Her interest in the cause made her speak well, and after setting forth simply the evils of continued enmity, she made her request that her sister's marriage should become the occasion of reconciliation with one who stood to her father in the place of a son.

Sir Hugh was startled at the boldness of the petition; but as if some such thought had been stirred and already debated in his

own mind, he answered it without excitement and with unusual seriousness.

While he lived, Middlethorpe should be guarded from the pollution of Edward's presence; after his death all was in the hands of God. "I may be wrong, Clare," he said, "I do not pretend to be infallible; but every man must act as best he can, according to his conscience; and my conscience commands me to show to all who look to me for guidance, that I condemn wickedness, whether of conduct or opinion, though in my own relation. If Edward should repent, it would be another matter; none would be better pleased than I."

"Perhaps he does," Clare said, with a kind of passion in her voice; "or perhaps he would, if any hand were stretched out to help him. Is it kind, is it right to make no effort to recal him to himself?"

“If I were an old man alone, my darling,” Sir Hugh said kindly, “perhaps I should feel as you do, perhaps I should have Edward here and try my hand on him; but I am a father, and a master, and a landlord—a kind of priest”—and he drew himself up with dignity—“among my people; and I will show by my conduct what is my sense of right and wrong. Let it be. If I hear of Edward repenting and doing his duty, be sure I should be as ready as you are to stretch out my hand to him. I am not angry, my love, but I am resolved; and you must believe that I am a better judge in this matter than a young thing like you can be.”

Clare could not gainsay her father’s arguments, yet she felt that means there must be of reaching and endeavouring to influence even those whose ways conscience might command you to condemn.

She was found in much regret and disappointment by Mr. Grantley; and to him, her own peculiar friend and counsellor, she spoke of what was in her mind. "And yet," she concluded, "perhaps, after all, I am wrong. Why is it that I take so great an interest in my cousin?"

"Because you are a little enthusiastic yourself, my dear child, and soft-hearted into the bargain. I don't blame you; I think, on the contrary, you have great right on your side. Let the subject rest for the present; at some future time I will second your efforts. I have been thinking much of your cousin of late; and a few days ago, I wrote to a friend in London, to beg him to make some inquiries regarding his present course of life and conduct: he promised to do so. If any good appears, anything hopeful, I will go to Sir Hugh, and tell him my mind."

As he returned home, Mr. Grantley met Ralph ; and the subject of his conversation with Clare being still in his mind, he began to make inquiries regarding Edward Willoughby—whether he knew him, and what he knew, and if he knew what he was now doing.

Ralph answered as best he could with truth, but vaguely and unsatisfactorily ; and to escape from Mr. Grantley's perplexing questions, inquired, in return, into their cause. Mr. Grantley mentioned what had taken place at Middlethorpe ; adding, “Perhaps, I am indiscreet in saying this : but, somehow or other, Mr. Caradoc, I believe there is nothing I would not and might not safely entrust to you.”

He was right ; Ralph was discretion itself —but on this occasion he thought it no lack of discretion to report to Edward intelligence so interesting to him. Happy to

have something cheering to tell, he went home with his report, and great was his surprise and disappointment at the indifference with which it was received.

“ Well, Ralph, but what do I care for him ?” was his reply to his friend’s information.

“ For whom ?” was Ralph’s natural question.

“ That Edward Willoughby you have been talking about !”

Ralph stared, till Edward burst out laughing. In a moment, however, he was grave again, and said very seriously, “ My only feeling for that man is, that he stands between me and my hopes. Her mind is so full of him, that I believe she has no place to admit another. What object would it be to me, that she should kindly receive me as her cousin, when, as *myself*, I have failed

to win her love? No, Ralph, her love I must have as I now am; I care for nothing besides."

Ralph drew a chair to the window where Edward was sitting, and after considering the matter for some moments said, "This is nothing but madness, Edward; do not throw away a chance of happiness for a folly unworthy of you. I came home determined to press you to reveal yourself; you have her on your side, you will have Mr. Grantley's best wishes and best endeavours. Surely these two can influence Sir Hugh,—it seems, besides, a case of necessity. Mr. Grantley is making inquiries. If you do not reveal yourself, you will be discovered, and then——"

"I defy him to discover me," Edward said decidedly; "my plans are too well laid to be baffled by any inquiries short of a

year's search. You little know me if you think I have left loop-holes to spy at me."

"A secret, my dear fellow, is never safe ; and what I wish to impress upon you is that a discovery must add considerably to our difficulties. I don't know how you feel, Edward, but when Sir Hugh asked me to be his daughter's trustee, I felt nothing better than an impostor, and I am sure I can truly say I have not had a good night's rest since I heard of it."

Edward stretched out his hand to Ralph. It was a common, simple action with him, marking his moments of feeling and kindness. "Bear with me, Ralph," he said; "you have done so much for me that I do not even apologize for asking you to do more. I would attend to your request if I could. I will attend to it as soon as I can ; but this point is not an indifferent one. Give me a few days

more and then I will come to a decision. For yourself you need have no fear; you are one who can walk unharmed in the fire of suspicion, nothing can touch the excellence of your character. This is no compliment; you must bear with me, then."

Ralph sighed, smiled, and yielded.

"What shall you do next, Edward?" was his question, after a moment's thought."

"How, in what way?"

"As regards *her*, my dear fellow, I have been wishing to speak to you on this point for some days."

"Then speak, Ralph: what would you have me do?"

"I would have you come forward a little more. Forgive me, Edward, but I think you take it too coldly."

"Coldly," and Edward laid his burning hand on his friend's, for a moment.

“I beg your pardon, Edward; I do not mean in yourself. I believe I can guess pretty well what you feel here,” and with a half smile, not without sadness, he touched his heart; “but I mean you show nothing; you seem cold and careless; even I, who know what you feel only sometimes from your manner, can discover it.”

With one of Edward’s sudden changes of tone and feeling, he now touched Ralph’s shoulder and said mirthfully, “How would you set about the business of love-making? Come, Ralph, you are older than I am—give me a lesson.”

“I would set about it seriously,” his friend replied with gravity. “I would show what I wished and that all my heart was in it.”

“But, Ralph, if you are too serious, you make a bugbear of yourself, and fear scares away love. All good things grow

slowly. I never expected to inspire a sudden passion—I never wished it—I do not admire the characters that feel those sudden passions for strangers. This is very unromantic, Ralph, but true. I like to read about Juliet, but I never should have been in love with her. That there are men worthy of such passions I do not deny; but I know I am not one of them; if there is anything worth loving in me it lies deep."

"True, Edward; but still there is a medium—two months is a long time." And he shook his head with the conscious thought, how needlessly long for him.

"And have I made no use of them?" Edward asked with a lightness, under which in vain he endeavoured to mask his intense anxiety.

Ralph read the anxiety, but nothing ever led him a step beyond the truth. Clare's ease

of manner seemed to him a decided bar to Edward's hopes. He spoke, however, as kindly and hopefully as he could. "I can't very well answer you, Edward. Miss Willoughby likes you, I am sure; but how much is hard to tell. All I am certain of is, that she does not understand what you feel; and, as she is not a Juliet, I think she may require to see that before she feels herself. Some people, you know, have their hearts outside, and these are more easily caught; others hide them within, and, I agree with you, those are the hearts I would care to have. You must dive down before you can reach them."

Edward listened without hearing. He was deep in thought. At last he said, "Well, Ralph, perhaps you are right. It must be done. I will make the plunge; but I am a coward," he added, shuddering; "I dread

it. Oh ! Ralph, if I fail here I am a bankrupt indeed !”

He did not wait for reply or sympathy, but jumped out of the low window and disappeared.

* * * *

It so happened that Edward saw Clare no more till the day before her sister’s marriage. He went twice to Middlethorpe ; but she had accompanied her sister to pay some farewell visits in the neighbourhood, and was not to be seen.

The afternoon before the wedding-day Ralph was sent for by Sir Hugh to make some signatures to the marriage settlement, and Edward went to Middlethorpe with him. He had little expectation of seeing Clare alone, and perhaps that confidence made him repeat to Ralph his resolution to make the plunge ; meaning thereby not the taking of

any decided step, but simply an endeavour to open her eyes as to his wishes.

On entering the garden by the privileged way, they found all the family assembled there with the exception of Sir Hugh. It was now late in the autumn, but the weather was still summer-like, and heliotrope and geraniums were brightening the beds. Mrs. Hollis sat working on the bank beside the stream, and on the terrace-walk beyond, Colonel Ashton was drawing, with the two sisters behind him. He was making a sketch of the house for his betrothed; and she and Clare, no artists themselves, were watching with interest his rough but effective strokes.

Ralph proceeded to the library according to appointment; Edward crossed the garden to join the group on the terrace.

As he approached, Colonel Ashton looked up from his drawing with a smile, and said,

“Don’t think me fidgety, Ellen ; but if Mr. Leigh is to be a spectator I shall never have done. Save me from him.”

Clare smiled, and promising to take charge of Edward, went to meet him.

She told him her errand with the ease and freedom their acquaintance warranted, and invited him, till the sketch should be finished, to accompany her to the front of the house. The servants had ornamented the old archway with bright autumnal flowers ; and though there was something incongruous in the decorations, the care and taste exhibited was pleasing, and the feelings which had excited it still more so.

Edward consented, and found himself with her alone ; but the resolutions he had formed, and the promises he had made, faded away. Never had her manner been more unembarrassed—never more like indifference. “If

I startle her now," he thought, "with my wild words, this perhaps will be our last meeting." And his decision was that, come what might, Ralph must wait.

His hopeless thoughts made him silent and gloomy. Clare scarcely observed that it was so. She was as silent as he. The day was sad to her, and had been passed in painful efforts to be cheerful, for her father and Ellen's sake. The departure of her only sister was no light trial. She felt grateful for the relief which Edward's society afforded. With him there was no need for exertion.

Before they reached the proper point for observation, Edward became conscious of the silence of his companion. He shook off his own thoughts and watched her. Her countenance was easily read.

"That makes you melancholy to look at," he observed kindly, as at length they stood before the arch.

She smiled, and roused herself. "A little melancholy, I confess," she replied, "but not unhappy. I should be very ungrateful if I allowed it to make me unhappy."

"We cannot always help such ingratitude."

"I am not sure about that," she said playfully. "I think we can help a great many more things than we are disposed to allow; but is not this prettily done? Papa is so pleased with it."

"It is at least prettily intended," Edward said with kindness. "One reads in it attachment, and gratitude, and many pleasant feelings." He paused a moment, then added, not without excitement, "How happy Middlethorpe is!"

Clare smiled at the abrupt exclamation.

"You have always lived here: you can hardly fancy how it affects one accustomed to other scenes. It is like the abode of peace.

I find myself continually thinking of Milton's description of Satan's first view of Paradise."

"You can hardly say too much in its praise for me," Clare said warmly; "but I know I am not a fair judge. I am prejudiced."

"You are very fond of it, then?" he inquired, fixing his eyes upon her, yet speaking quietly. "You would never leave it if you could?"

"Pray do not speak of the future," she said, in the hurried tone in which she had once before answered his questions. This was one he had no right to ask, and she felt it; but anger was not the sensation it caused.

No thought of *him* in that hurried tone, in that unwillingness to look on. So Edward saw, and he said with bitterness, "I beg your pardon for forcing your eyes in that direction; the fault is in mine; they will look that way, though they do not see much to attract them there."

“I don’t know that it is a fault,” Clare said, speaking kindly to the disappointment evident in his speech; “but I am sure that it is a misery. I think, too,” she continued, smiling, “that if your fault in that way is very great, you are mistaken when you think Middlethorpe would suit your taste.”

“How so?” he said, with anxiety in his tone.

“It is so quiet and monotonous,” she replied. “Perfectly happy to those who have contented minds, but I can fancy driving to madness those whose wishes are all in the future. I don’t think a quiet life is good for restless spirits.”

“Perhaps not if their wishes are ungranted; but how—” and here Edward’s voice changed, and a smile of singular sweetness flitted over his face—“how would it be with wishes gained?”

His manner was rarely soft: it was ex-

citable, passionate, sportive, and resolute by turns, but only on rare occasions gentle. This gave to his moments of softness a peculiar and strange attraction. There was something in the softness of this moment which affected Clare as if by magic—in some unaccountable way touched and startled her—brought a pulse to her heart and a glow to her cheek.

“I cannot tell,” she replied, scarcely knowing what she said.

In an instant she had recovered herself and driven away the strangeness of the sensation; but feeling suddenly uncomfortable and embarrassed, she observed that Colonel Ashton must now be ready and prepared to return.

They walked back in silence. The evening was very still—not a sound to be heard but Ellen’s voice in the distance, and the soft

fall of the never-ceasing waters. Clare felt the stillness, but instead of calming, it agitated her. Perhaps with strange unconscious sympathy she felt the beating heart beside her. Edward was in a turmoil of contending feelings. He had seen the effect of his words, and yet doubted in the intensity of the interest the powers of his perception. One moment something impelled him on, assuring him of success; the next, a cold touch seemed to withhold him, warning that disappointment was at hand.

While still at a distance from the terrace, and while yet undecided what course to pursue, his indecision was ended by a movement of his companion. Instead of pursuing her way around the garden and over the bridge, which was a walk of some length, Clare suddenly crossed the grass to the spot where Mrs. Hollis was sitting. It was in obedience

to some unacknowledged desire for other company—some feeling of embarrassment and discomfort in Edward's presence.

The protection of Mrs. Hollis's company was no sooner felt than Clare's uneasiness vanished, and sitting down beside her on the bench she occupied, she began to talk as usual.

Edward composed himself. He felt sad and depressed, and knew not whether to be relieved or troubled that his plunge had been prevented. He joined, however, in conversation with Mrs. Hollis on the beauty of the day and the singular mildness of the season, and other topics that arose naturally and without thought.

At one moment, from a casual remark from one of the party, all eyes were turned towards the spot where Ellen still stood by Colonel Ashton's side.

“ You are now so accustomed to that idea,” Edward said to Clare, directing his finger towards them, “ that I have no doubt you almost forget your surprise when the first announcement of the marriage was made.”

“ Yes,” she said, smiling; “ I can hardly understand now how I came to be surprised.”

“ I could never understand it,” Edward observed; “ I saw what would shortly take place the very first night I came to Middlethorpe.”

“ Did you ?” Clare said, surprised into an expression of astonishment.

“ I did indeed. Do you doubt me ?”

“ Oh, no !” and she shook her head: but though she did not doubt, her surprise was great.

“ I see you do not quite believe me,” he continued, smiling. “ Why should it surprise you that I have the use of my eyes.”

“I believe, Mr. Leigh,” Mrs. Hollis said, looking up from her work, “if we had thought of anybody for Miss Ellen, it would have been yourself sooner than Colonel Ashton. We were not likely to take such liberties with a man of his years and experience.”

“Did *you* think that?” Edward said, turning suddenly to Clare, and fixing an intent and searching gaze on her face.

She blushed deeply, and turned away her head.

He stood silent and dejected. If such had been her expectation, what hope was there for him. Yet hope refused to die. From its very destruction it gathered new life.

“Should you have liked to have me for Miss Ellen’s husband,” he inquired of Mrs. Hollis lightly, and yet agitatedly.

“Indeed, Mr. Leigh,” was her dry reply, “I never trouble myself to think of impossibilities.”

He smiled and looked at Clare; and there was something nervous and troubled in the smile that answered him that made his heart bound within him. A moment afterwards they were joined by Sir Hugh, with Ralph and Mr. Grantley; and nothing more passed between them.

Ellen meanwhile standing by Colonel Ashton had followed them with her eyes as they went on their way and returned. She had never ceased to watch Edward since the night of her hasty remark; but it was not always that she was convinced of the truth of her sudden discovery. At the moment of their reappearing from the other side of the house and as they crossed the garden towards Mrs. Hollis, she

said suddenly to her companion, “Now look, do look at Clare and Mr. Leigh. What do you think now of what I said?”

Colonel Ashton raised his eyes from the drawing and obediently looked in the direction she desired. “Well, Ellen,” he said, “I don’t see much; but then I am not very discerning. What do you see?”

“I don’t know,” she replied; “I wish I did know, only I think certainly not indifference. Mr. Leigh is so strange, he puzzles me.”

“What do you wish?” he inquired, devoting himself again to his drawing. “If Mr. Leigh is in love with Clare, would it please you?”

“I don’t know,” she said again. “What do you think?—is he worthy of her?”

“By no means,” was the hasty reply.

“But then, perhaps, nobody is.”

“That I think likely enough ; but there may be more worthy than he.”

“I like Mr. Leigh,” Ellen said ; “I dare say, indeed I see, myself, that he has a thousand faults ; but I like him—he interests me—he is so unlike everybody else I ever saw.”

“Edward Leigh certainly makes no concealment of his faults,” Colonel Ashton said seriously ; “they are visible to every eye. I don’t say this unkindly, for I feel like you that there is much to interest in him, but his faults are such as I think would fail to cause a happy marriage. He has, for instance, a restless, dissatisfied nature. How would that suit your sister ?”

“I think she would cure it,” Ellen said, smiling. “I can fancy that a person may very well be restless and unquiet when they are doubtful of gaining what they wish ; I

feel to understand Mr. Leigh ; I don't know how it is, but I feel very strangely about him."

"How is that?" Colonel Ashton asked, smiling at the matronly way in which this was said.

"I mean that I feel to know him much better than I have any reason for knowing him. I felt it from the first day. There was no difficulty in making his acquaintance, the only difficulty was *not* to be impertinent and seem to know him too well. Now I am sure I never should have that kind of feeling for anybody who was not worthy and good in his heart; therefore if he is in love with Clare, as I think he is, I don't think I shall be sorry."

"But perhaps Clare would."

"Ah ! that is what I wish I knew."

"And your father ?"

"I don't think papa would be angry. I

daresay he might not be very much delighted at first, but he likes Mr. Leigh, and takes an interest in him. He was talking about him yesterday. At first I thought, with some idea of this in his head, but I believe not."

Colonel Ashton shook his head a little gravely and doubtfully ; but the others were now approaching, and he hastily finished his sketch.

With some people the consciousness of what they feel comes slowly. Self-examination is one thing, a needful practice—self-scrutiny another, and a dangerous one. It was not that night that Clare became conscious that Edward must ever henceforward influence her existence. Though thoughtful in disposition, and disposed to ponder on the ways of life, she was little disposed to scrutinize or ponder on herself. With all her wisdom

and sound judgment—and she had much of both—she had indeed something of a child's nature, yielding to the sensation of the moment, but neither searching into its nature when present, nor pursuing it when vanished. Occupied with her sister, her father, and his guests, she turned readily and wholly from the feelings that had embarrassed her; and even Ellen's close and anxious watchfulness failed to penetrate the secret of the new light and life and love that was dawning within.

CHAPTER XI.

“ It may be a sound,
A note of music, summer’s eve, or spring,
A flower, the wind, the ocean, which shall wound,
Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly
bound.”

CHILDE HAROLD.

WHEN Ellen called her father, as was her custom, on the morning of her wedding-day, she found him up and dressed. He was seated at his table with something open before him ; and there was an expression of seriousness, rather subdued than sad, on his countenance.

He called her to come to him, and put his arm round her waist. “ Do you know this, my darling ? ” he asked, showing her a beautiful miniature of her mother.

She kissed him in acknowledgment that she did.

“I am looking at it this morning, Ellen. I can bear to look at it more than I always can, because this day one of her dying wishes is accomplished.”

“What wish?” Ellen asked softly.

“That you should marry a good man, my darling. When she gave you two frail young things into my charge, she bade me so to bring you up, that when you came to years of discretion, no light and vain qualities should win your hearts. Her prayer was, that you might learn to choose husbands who would help you to walk soberly through the dangers of this world, and lead you safely to the next. I have had many wakeful hours over this, Ellen, especially since you grew up so gay and giddy, like a young butterfly.”

“There was no fear, papa,” she said gently.

“I don’t know that, my darling; but there is none now, for you have made a choice for which she blesses you from Heaven. And now I have but one more care, and then I will say my ‘nunc dimittis’ whenever God pleases. Let my precious Clare make a choice worthy of her, and I have nothing left to wish for in this world.”

“I think you may trust Clare, papa,” Ellen said with earnestness. “Whoever she chooses *must* be good, or she will not choose him.”

“My dear child,” her father said, “we must not, any of us poor mortals, be over-confident; we do our best, but the best of us may be deceived. Why, I myself, Ellen—not that I call myself one of the best, God forbid! but even I, with all my experience,

might perhaps be deceived ; and how much more a young thing, steady though she is, like Clare. No, no ; we can but hope—so I must still have wakeful nights for her. But you are safe, my darling, and that's a great thing ; and that's why this day is the happiest day of my life since the day——” He paused, and a sigh came from the recollections of long past years ; then kissing his daughter he dismissed her.

There was little in the wedding to merit description. It was pretty, not from grandeur, but from its primitiveness and simplicity,—and interesting, from the hearty feeling shown by the spectators. It was touching, from many concurring and apparent causes, the youth of the bride and the age and character of the bridegroom—the happiness left behind in the past, and the hopes of happiness dawning in the future—most of all

from the proud tenderness shown by the father and the love of the child. When, at the conclusion of the service, the bride rose from her knees, and, turning for a moment from the hand her husband held out, threw herself into her father's arms, while his hearty voice, with a slight tremble, said, “God bless you, my darling!”—there was a thrill of emotion among many of the spectators, and Ralph felt his arm seized with a hard grasp by the one who stood beside him. Surprised, he looked in Edward's face, and saw his brows knit into an expression of pain. It was indeed with pain Edward saw that confiding affection: wrapt in the one thought of winning Clare, Sir Hugh's feelings had of late become of less than secondary consideration; something told him, now, that it would be through the father's favour only that the daughter's could be won.

Though simple and unostentatious, Sir Hugh was hearty in his hospitality. He liked his old friends and neighbours to see his satisfaction ; and a large party returned to Middlethorpe to breakfast. Before it took place, Colonel Ashton and Ellen set forth on their journey. They had a long way to go, Colonel Ashton's house, in Monmouthshire, being sixty miles from Middlethorpe.

As they started, a slight incident happened which awakened Clare to the knowledge of her own heart.

When Ellen left the house, her father and sister, accompanied by twenty or thirty other guests, followed her to the hall door. Clare stood in the front row, a thick throng behind her. Ellen had wished her good-bye, and was being led by her father to the carriage ; when at the carriage step she paused,

turned round, went a few steps backward, and put some flowers she had carried all the morning, into her sister's hand. Why she did it she did not know; it was a momentary impulse; but there was something in the action that affected Clare, and the tears she had hitherto resolutely restrained fell thick and fast from her eyes. She tried to escape, but the throng, gazing with all their eyes at the departing bride, formed an impenetrable barrier behind her. Edward's eyes were upon her—as when where they not!—and without effort, without fuss, almost without a movement, he stretched out his arm, opened a way for her, and made her pass.

Why this simple action should have enlightened her eyes, it would be hard to tell. There was no effort to engage her attention—for the moment, indeed, Edward had forgotten himself;—but suddenly she felt, that

between her and him there was that hidden sympathy which is the bond of spirits—felt even in the moment of her sister's departure—a new hand of affection laid on her own more than able to replace what she had lost.

She only felt this—there was no reflection—no scrutiny. She dried her tears, and hastened back to meet her father, and to assist him in the attentions it pleased him to show his guests; but she knew that all things in life had taken a new aspect to her eyes; and Edward knew it also—saw it at a glance—saw it in her averted eyes and heightened colour—heard it in the hurried tone of her voice. The time for decision was drawing near.

Agitated and restless, almost beyond his own control, he had yet the forbearance not to approach her at a time when her self-

command was so much needed. He left Middlethorpe with the rest of the guests, to return only at dinner-time. Hope was high in his heart ; but he loved too deeply for hope to be anything but an anxious thing, more akin to fear than to hope's proper being. Concentred all on Clare, Sir Hugh, and his own peculiar and personal circumstances, were forgotten. There were but two things in the world—his love, and Clare.

CHAPTER XII.

“ Thy foe’s before thee,—thou must fight, or fly.”
QUARLES.

WHEN Ralph and Edward entered the drawing-room at Middlethorpe, they found a large party assembled. There were old friends now on a visit to Sir Hugh; a few select friends who had been present in the morning; and several strangers—acquaintances too little intimate to be invited to the marriage, but to whom Sir Hugh desired to extend his civilities on the occasion. Few of the party being known to the young men,

they made their way to Clare, who sat beside the fireplace. Edward placed himself behind her: he had seen her colour rise as he approached, and whether it boded him good or ill, he was sufficiently considerate to determine to leave her undisturbed, for the better performance of her present duties.

Ralph began to talk to her. While he was speaking, Clare observed a gentleman who stood on the opposite side of the fireplace, bow to some person beyond her. She knew Edward was there, and the bow chanced to attract her attention, because the gentleman had not been at Middlethorpe during his stay in the country, having only a few days previously returned from a foreign tour.

In two or three seconds, the bow was repeated. Clare now glanced round, and though it was almost impossible the saluta-

tion should not have been perceived, observed that Edward was standing unmoved. His inattention caused her some amusement, for it was a behaviour which, had it not been for natural and necessary civility, the attentions of the person in question would often have provoked her to assume. He was a gentleman belonging to the family of Paul Pry—possessed of an insatiable curiosity regarding the affairs of others, and with a desire equally intense to set those right who were in the wrong, and sometimes (though this was unconsciously) to put those in the wrong who were right. He was not naturally unamiable, but his propensities led him to many unamiable actions, and he was well-known in the country as a mischief-maker.

A third time the bow was repeated, and Clare thought it best to call Edward's attention to the circumstance. "Do you know

Mr. Molesey, Mr. Leigh? I think he is bowing to you."

Edward's colour rose to his temples, but he answered calmly, "I don't know him; but it seems he knows me." He then coldly returned the salutation, and drew still further backward.

A moment afterwards, dinner was ready. "Ralph," Edward then said, laying his hand on his arm as he detained him behind the others, "that man remembers me. Who he is I have not a guess; but I know the face, and I read mischief in his eyes. What I do now must be done quickly. Pity me, for more than life is in the balance." His voice was hoarse with suppressed agitation. Ralph could only look the sincerity of his compassion, for already the mischievous eye was darting backward its curious glances into their conference.

The hour of dinner passed off quietly. The stranger was placed at a distance from Sir Hugh, Clare, and Edward, and made no efforts to engage their notice. He was perhaps better employed in observing them.

When Clare and Mrs. Hollis disappeared, Ralph and Edward were reduced to silence. During dinner, both—the one from policy, the other from kindness—had exerted themselves to add to the liveliness, or relieve the dullness of the humdrum party; but when the gentlemen were left to themselves, the conversation became general, and very shortly purely local. To those interested in the small politics of a country neighbourhood it was exciting, but strangers had nothing to say. Ralph sate mute and quiet; Edward, dumb but restless; his eye on the door, his mind plotting means of escape, and the possibility of seeing Clare alone.

Mr. Grantley, always kind and thoughtful, perceived their abstraction ; and as he was seated near Sir Hugh, murmured something in his ear. Sir Hugh took the hint.

“ Young men,” he cried good-humouredly, “ what is interesting to us, may not be interesting to you. If you prefer the society of Mrs. Hollis and my daughter to that of the company here assembled, why I can only say, I, for my part, will overlook the offence.”

Mr. Grantley nodded to them to accept the offer ; and with a smile from Ralph, and a look of intense thankfulness from Edward, both left the room.

They found Mrs. Hollis alone ; but Edward was not to be baffled, his courage was up, he was mad almost in his excitement.

He approached Mrs. Hollis, and said abruptly, “ Where is Miss Willoughby ?”

She looked up in amazement at the strange imperious tone; but there are some questions that *will* be answered; this was one. She could not refuse the information he sought.

“Miss Willoughby is in that room,” she replied coldly, bowing her head towards the door in the panel.

“May I go and speak to her?” he said in the same resolute tone; plainly implying, that given or not, the permission would be taken.

Mrs. Hollis was startled and offended, but again submitted herself. She bowed with stateliness, and acquiesced.

“Mr. Leigh is behaving himself in a strange way,” she relieved herself by saying to Ralph.

“Poor Edward!” was his reply.

She opened her eyes—became suddenly enlightened—then, far too discreet to make a

further inquiry, began to hem with vehemence.

Meanwhile Edward approached the door ; he knocked softly, but waited for no reply, and went in. He became calm as he entered, for there was calmness in the atmosphere of the room, speaking as it did of earthly hopes vanished, and vanished affections living still.

The room was lighted by a lamp from the ceiling, and was bright with a softened and subdued light. It had been thus lighted during Lady Willoughby's lifetime, that she might go in and out at pleasure ; and thus, by Sir Hugh's order, the nightly recollection of her presence was renewed.

Clare was standing at the window. The evening was mild, and the moonlight calm and lovely ; but Clare was reflecting, not gazing. There was something active and vigorous in her mind, which made her indis-

posed to dreamy reveries, and when she thought it was deeply,—bringing all her powers to bear on the subject before her. The present subject may easily be imagined. She had had little time during the day to ponder upon it in its various bearings, as it regarded her father, Edward, and herself; and feeling the time was near when she might be called on for a decision, she was come to form it now. It was an old habit, and one that had exercised a beneficial influence on her character, to bring all grave questions to examination in her mother's room. There the various duties of life assumed their true character; there it was hard for temporal interests to overshadow eternal duties.

She heard the knock, and looked round without speaking. When she saw Edward she knew at once wherefore he was come, and

stood to await him : her heart beat thick and fast, and her colour ebbed and flowed ; but when occasions came she was rarely unready to meet them.

“Mrs. Hollis gave me leave to come,” Edward hurriedly explained, and joined her at the window ; but when he stood there, the longing he had felt to be in her presence gave place to an agony of fear. A profound silence followed his entrance ; and when at last he spoke, it was on an indifferent subject.

“What a rushing sound there is in the stream to night,” he observed quietly ; “what does it portend ?”

“A change, I am afraid,” Clare as quietly replied. “Stormy weather is coming.”

Another silence, and then Edward collected himself. “Clare, may I speak to you ?” he said.

She bowed her head in assent.

His words were few, and, contrary to his usual manner when excited, calm—their intensity made them so. It is a hackneyed expression to say he spoke as if life depended on the decision ; yet, at the moment, he felt as if far more than life was in the balance—as much more as happiness is beyond existence. When they were said, he added, “Now, Clare, speak—do not keep me in suspense.”

“I will not,” she said steadily, though her voice was low. “For myself I can easily answer you ; but it rests with papa—I will never displease him—never, never leave him.”

“You shall not need,” Edward cried, passionately grasping her hand, “for I will be his son. Oh ! Clare, do you know who I am ? I am Edward Willoughby.”

She drew her hand away with a startled

gaze and hasty movement, and “Oh! Edward, what have you done?” burst from her lips.

“Have I done ill, Clare?” he cried excitedly. “I have ventured this, and would do it again for your love.”

She made no answer, but came out into the room, and stood for a moment as if thinking deeply. Edward could see the hurried beat of her heart, and, as the lamp-light fell on her face, the paleness of her cheek.

“Clare, speak!” he cried again, almost with violence, seizing her hand. “Do not torture me!—give me hope or I shall go mad.”

She drew back her hand with a seriousness that alarmed him. “I was trying to think,” she said, “but I cannot. All I know is, I must not listen to you now.”

“One minute!” he cried. “Let me tell you all.”

She shook her head. “No, Edward; not now. Not till papa knows. I would not for the world. Let us go back.”

So saying, she went to the door, and laid her hand upon it. There she paused a moment, and looked round. Edward’s countenance touched her; she went back and held out her hand to him. “Dear Edward, do not think me unkind,” she said quietly, speaking to him as to her cousin—so long known, so familiar to her mind. “Papa trusts me, and I would not for the world stay with you till he knows. We must wait and be patient; and if it is painful to you,” she added, with still greater softness, “remember you do not bear it alone.”

Edward saw she was resolved; let go her hand; and followed her, in silence, to the drawing-room.

Ralph and Mrs. Hollis were enjoying each other's society in silence. Both were seated, but on Clare's entrance, Ralph rose and directed towards her and her companion a glance of earnest inquiry. Mrs. Hollis worked steadily on. To have no curiosity would not have been in human nature, but she was too discreet to endeavour to satisfy it by common means. She had eyes, as she often said, and was thankful for them, but she rarely condescended to use them.

Ralph's glance of inquiry received no satisfying answer. Edward's cheek was flushed, and his eyes sparkled; but yet he looked anxious and dispirited. Clare was pale and very grave. Her disturbance did not look like indifference; and yet her seriousness had no symptoms of excited feeling. Ralph could not understand one or the other.

Clare sat down and took up her work; and after some moments' silence, during which she seemed to be deciding on a point or course of action, addressed Ralph on an indifferent topic. Edward stood at a little distance, looking at her, as if in the world there was no object but her.

Anxious to relieve Clare, and give her time to think, Ralph came towards her and began to talk, not according to his usual habit, yielding short answers to long questions, but taking, with kind purpose, the burden of the conversation upon himself. Plunging into the recesses of his mind, he found, at length, an anecdote, and relieved her entirely by dilating this into immoderate proportions. He had not quite extricated himself from a vain search after the point of the tale, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Sir Hugh and the rest, and he retired, leaving

the point unfound. He then managed to approach Edward, and murmured, “How is it, my dear fellow ?” but received for answer only a hard and painful gripe on his arm, and with that was forced to be content.

There was plenty of noise and conversation in the room, and for some time he stood by Edward, giving him the silent sympathy of his company ; but suddenly perceiving Mr. Molesey’s inquisitive eyes directed towards them, he whispered to Edward, “ You had better exert yourself ;” and mingled with the crowd.

Edward did then rouse himself, and moved a few steps nearer to the rest of the world. He was met and addressed by Mr. Grantley. To Mr. Grantley, Edward’s feelings were not entirely a secret. He had recently discovered their existence ; but was little aware to what a height they had arisen, and was entirely at

a loss as to whether they were returned. Reading uncommon disturbance on his brow this night, he came to him, with the kind intention of relieving him from the notice of Sir Hugh.

In the midst of the noisy conversations of many of the company, Mr. Molesey approached Clare. No better person could have been found, if she desired to have her thoughts diverted from a painful subject, for with him it was necessary always to be on your guard. He had a way of putting questions and drawing inferences, all in a smooth and quiet way, which required vigilant attention to baffle, in so far, at least, as you desired to keep your private thoughts and opinions from his knowledge. His great subject this day was Ellen's marriage. He made very minute and inquisitive inquiries into the progress of the attachment, pro-

fessing extreme surprise that Miss Ellen should have fancied so old a man ; dropping a hint as to the advantageousness of the match, as regarded worldly concerns, ending with—“Which, Miss Willoughby, we none of us scorn, say what we may.”

In early days, Clare would have been roused to indignation ; but for some time she had been aware that the wisest course is to let things alone, and not to answer impertinence. She took it, therefore, very quietly ; spoke civilly, though coldly ; and on unimportant points gave him the information he desired.

Perhaps her manner piqued him—perhaps from the first he had intended to enlighten her as to the discovery he had made. However this might be, suddenly he drew a chair close to her chair, and began to whisper, in a mysterious manner,—

"I have met an old acquaintance here to-night, under circumstances that surprise me. I allude to Mr. Leigh—you must of course be aware that Leigh is an assumed name"—here he paused, and looked at her with expectant, delighted eyes,—“that he is, in fact, a relative of your own—Mr. Wiloughby.”

Clare's heart leaped into her mouth ; of all the persons present, he was the one from whom she would have kept the disclosure if she could. But after one sudden rush of blood to her cheek, and one anxious glance at her father, she replied quietly, “I never knew it till to night; but I know it now.”

He had hoped to be first in the announcement, and was disappointed ; still more disappointed at her quiet manner. He continued in a louder key—“I met him two years ago at Rome—saw him there constantly.

Perhaps you observed that I bowed to him?"

She assented.

"Yes; I remember you called his attention to the fact. He seemed as if he wished to avoid me. May I ask you, Miss Willoughby, if there is any reason for the extraordinary disguise Mr. Willoughby is now assuming?"

To any one but Mr. Molesey, Clare would have said, "I do not wish my father to make this discovery before so many witnesses, as it will much disturb him;" but she could not trust him. She preferred to let things take their course, rather than in any way to throw herself on his compassion. She only replied, therefore, maintaining as steady a countenance as she could, "I think there must be good reasons for a conduct so strange; would it not be better, therefore, Mr. Molesey, to apply to Mr. Leigh himself for a solution of the difficulty?"

“I wished to set *you* on your guard,” he replied, in a friendly tone ; “these disguises sometimes lead to mischief.”

“That they are sure to do,” she said, raising her eyes and *looking* what she could not say in words, a request that he would be still, and keep his knowledge to himself.

Mr. Molesey was extremely puzzled by what was going on. To whom was the state of the case known ? For what purpose was Edward here ? Why did not Clare ask him to keep the secret, if it was a seeret, between herself and her cousin ? Much perplexed, he felt himself absolutely called upon, as a sacred and imperative duty, to keep watch, and discover what the mystery might be.

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